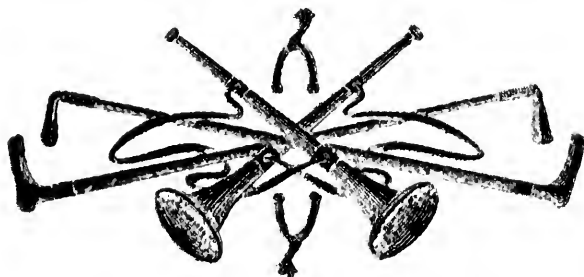


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VOLUME II.

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THE QUORN HUNTSMAN AND HOUNDS

FOX-HUNTING IN THE SHIRES

BY

T. F. DALE, M.A.

AUTHOR OF

“THE HISTORY OF THE BELVOIR HUNT,” “THE VIIITH DUKE OF
BEAUFORT AND THE BADMINTON HUNT,” ETC.

ILLUSTRATED FROM PHOTOGRAPHS BY

R. B. LODGE AND OTHERS

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P R E F A C E

IN this volume Mr. Dale has given the results of his experience in the hunting fields of Leicestershire and the surrounding counties, and has treated his subject from the dual standpoint, for which his earlier work so fits him, of hunting historian and hunting correspondent. His chapters are almost entirely practical, though he digresses where necessary to criticise, always briefly and to the point, such modern questions as the presence of ladies in the field, the latest development of the capping system, and the question of hunting dress and hunting morals. For the most part, and with some few such exceptions, he gives us minute descriptions of the country known somewhat vaguely as "the Shires," and some very excellent advice as to the purchase or schooling of the right kind of horse for hunting that country. The photographs obtained by Mr. R. B. Lodge, with considerable guiding assistance from the author, have here and there been supplemented, with a view to illustrating in as practical fashion as possible the main features of the book.

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INTRODUCTION

IN the course of this book I have endeavoured to set before my readers a sketch of the sport of fox-hunting as it is throughout that part of the Midlands known as the Shires. Whatever may have been the case in the past, the fashionable hunting districts may now fairly be embraced within the wider limits treated of here. Such a book, though I hope it may not be without interest to those who know something of sport in grass countries, yet must naturally be of use chiefly to the man who wishes to learn more about fox-hunting in the historic hunts. It must not be forgotten, moreover, that the Midlands are not fashionable without reason, for people crowd to them because grazing districts are best suited of any to hunting in its brightest and most attractive form. But while I have striven to be of some practical service to the man who is, at the present day, anxious to hunt from some of the counties named, I have not been unmindful of the charms of the associations with the past so closely interwoven with hunting in these districts. No one who has not studied the subject can form any idea of the extent of the literature of hunting in the Midlands nor of its interest in throwing a light, not only on the sports but also on the social customs and ideals of our immediate forefathers. But such a book as this could

not be written only in the study. Its materials must to a great extent be gathered in the open air, and the advice contained in it suggested by participation in the scenes described. These chapters have, in fact, been written in the intervals of a busy season and in the rare leisure of a hunting correspondent whose duty and interest made him an observant spectator of the sport, and the book has therefore been put together in the atmosphere of hunting. I have hunted in nearly all the countries described; and when I planned the book, I rode and walked over some of the most characteristic parts of the country, in order that the descriptions of fences might be drawn from nature. I have often been able to make use of the past to explain the present and in many cases to illustrate the book with instances which, though drawn from the past, are just as appropriate to our own times. I have thus avoided to a great extent the use of names of persons still living and yet have conveyed the instruction and examples I needed to make clear my meaning. I hope that the arrangement of the book on the principle of treating of the various centres and sketching the sport to be obtained from them will commend itself to my readers as being the most practical method of dealing with the subject. This has enabled me, at the risk of some unavoidable repetition, to make this book to some extent a guide from a hunting point of view to a visitor to the places dealt with. I need not say that each town is written of entirely from the point of view of its suitability as a hunting centre. A friend of mine once threw a guide-book down with indignation: "Here," he said, "is a fellow who writes four pages about the architecture of a church and dismisses the F—— hounds and their kennels in a

single line. Why can't people write of what one wants to know ? " I trust that hunting readers will here find what they want.

The important subject of capping has been discussed in *The Field*, *The County Gentleman* and other papers. This has been a constant, almost burning topic of conversation both in the hunting field and at dinner-tables in the Shires. If worked with tact, courtesy and judgment, and not used as an instrument of oppression against the less wealthy *residents* in the countries where it is established, "capping" should work well. By casual visitors the "cap" ought to be welcomed as a means of making them free of the hunt and of discharging a most undoubted obligation in a convenient manner. Experience will enable Hunt committees to determine the amount suitable and the best method of collection. It may be regretted that the various hunts in the Shires could not have agreed to united action in the matter, but the conference on the subject apparently failed to arrive at any arrangement that was satisfactory to all. This makes the subject more complicated, because it is obviously ungracious and perhaps impolitic to cap a man on Wednesday who has welcomed you to ride over his land on a Monday, or who is a member of a hunt which still freely welcomes the men from neighbouring hunts when they cross the border. But time and experience will no doubt settle all these questions satisfactorily. The spirit is the great thing, for we must always recollect that hunting is not like a polo club or a gate-money race-meeting, and its survival may be attributed as much to the friendly, neighbourly and hospitable spirit in which it has hitherto been carried on as to any other one circumstance. To say that the sport can no

longer be conducted on these lines is to confess that its decadence is far advanced and that the end is not far off. It may well be believed that the true spirit of the hunting community will prove too strong for any adverse and ignoble influences. Especially will those take comfort who have read the history of fox-hunting carefully. None of the difficulties of fox-hunting except wire are new. As Charles Leadam, the late huntsman of the Meynell, used to say when anything went wrong : "It's all happened before." Hunting has survived many material and social changes and may perhaps continue to be the chief sport of English country residents long after we have passed away and our troubles are forgotten. Hunting men have always been inclined to be *laudatores temporis acti* ; but again a careful study of the past inclines me to think that the sport, if in some respects different, is quite as good as it was in old times. The hounds are probably better and the huntsmen more intelligent *on the average* than in the past, while the manners and customs of those who hunt have certainly very much improved. The pictures of "the fox-hunter" in the writers of the eighteenth century, nay, even as late as the days of the author of "Soapy Sponge," certainly would not be accepted even as reasonable caricatures in the present day by those who associate with hunting people. It is impossible to say everything on any subject within the limits of a book like this, but I have tried to avoid anything that might mislead and anything that I have not reason to believe to be a fact. With regard to subscription to the hunts, I had intended to give the minimum expected by each hunt, but that could not fail to be misleading, because the proper spirit in which to approach the subject is to consider not how

little we *must* give, but what we ought to afford. If we take down a dozen horses into the Shires, and mean to hunt six days a week, it is plain that we ought to contribute more to the hunts than a man with a much smaller stud. The test of a hunt subscription for the conscientious and liberal-minded man is similar to the charitable rule that we should not give what costs us nothing. Every man should make an effort for the sport to which he owes his health and happiness for half the year. The generous is also the wise course, for a judicious and sympathetic liberality strengthens the hands of those long-suffering persons, the master and secretary of the hunt, and increases the popularity of the sport far more than we dream of. In the chapter on Expenses I deal with the various legitimate claims on our purses. If I have compiled no budget, if there is no description of a royal road to hunting from Melton on £300 a year, it is because I know that all such attempts would be futile and misleading. I have striven to indicate the broad outlines of the necessary expenditure. Some people, without stinginess, will spend half what others do and have more to show for their money. The whole secret of economy in hunting is that we must, if we cannot spend freely, take trouble. Close attention to details, an untiring vigilance to stop leakage in the stable or the house by a careful superintendence, will make a difference of many hundreds in our expenditure. There is, in fact, no royal road to economy any more than there is to learning, and the old definition of genius is certainly true of successful thrift, that it is an infinite capacity for taking pains.

With regard to the sketches of the hunts, I wish to say that these are not to be taken as histories.

They are intended merely to trace the growth of hunting in each famous country. If the reader wishes for history, he will find it in the fuller and longer stories of the hunt, and in a most delightful form, in the "Druid" series, now accessible to all in a cheap and excellent reprint. Indeed, the Shires are fortunate in their literature, for in the whole range of books on sport there is nothing more delightful than the Druid's works. I recollect being somewhat disappointed with Mr. Dixon's life as written by an excellent sportsman, the late Mr. Francis Lawley. But this author's life was in his books. He makes himself the mouthpiece of others, and yet, with something that is not very far removed from genius, he gives to the opinions and conversations he recorded a character and a distinction that we can find in no similar writings. Hastily penned as were his books, in the midst of a life of continual pecuniary pressure and of hardship and self-denial, far different from the luxurious surroundings of modern sport, it is the Druid who shows us the most admirable aspects of hunting and racing. The whole story, though it deals with men of no education and sometimes, if other records may be believed, of rough and doubtful character, is never coarse. All the seamy side of the racecourse and covert-side disappears. The characters sketched are natural and lifelike. The Druid shows these men as they were at their best, with all the dross of their talk purged by passing through the mind of the man who, alone among sporting writers perhaps, brought genius to his task. His books breathe, as I have said, the very best spirit of our national open-air sport, and may be read with interest and profit by any one whether he is a sportsman or not. I have tried at least to write this book in the same spirit,

following, at however great a distance, in the footsteps of our greatest writer on sport. The works of the Druid and Whyte-Melville (a very different, but not less delightful, writer) have been given a long life (who dare say anything about immortality ?) by that court of final appeal of the public taste, which causes men to buy and read their books as eagerly to-day as when they first appeared. But I seem to hear my critics asking: What of the "admirable" Nimrod? This is an unfortunate epithet. Delightful he is, but not "admirable," either as a man or as a writer. Clever and spirited as his books are, he was a man of the Regency period and had the spirit of his age.

FOX-HUNTING IN THE SHIRES

CHAPTER I

FOX-HUNTING IN THE SHIRES

Scope of the "Shires"—A Flying Country—The Grass Countries of the Midlands—Artificial Coverts—Attractions of the Shires—Wire—Hunting not merely a Rich Man's Sport—Popularity of Hunting in Leicestershire—Abundance of Foxes—Drawbacks to Hunting in the Midlands—Causes of Long Runs—Visitors who seek the Grass Countries—First and Second Flight Men—Those who never Jump—Good Days and Bad—The Crowd in Leicestershire—Decay of Provincial Hunts—Getting a Start—Growing Popularity of the Midlands.

IN treating of Fox-hunting as it is in the countries known by a term sanctioned by long use as "The Shires," the first step is to define what districts those are, compared to which all others are styled provincial. In reality, the hunts that are entitled to be accounted within such limits are those which can be reached by people living in or near certain well-known hunting centres, such as Melton, Oakham, Market Harborough, Grantham, or Rugby. These hunts are the Quorn, the Belvoir, the Cottesmore, Mr. Fernie's, the Pytchley, the Woodland Pytchley, the Atherstone, and the Warwickshire.

About these last two there may be a question, and some writers would exclude them, but I think they are entitled to be considered as equal, and in parts

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superior, to the countries about which there is no doubt at all. The fact that their hunting-grounds are on old turf for at least two days in the week, and that they can be reached from one of the centres above mentioned, is sufficient to entitle them to a place in this book. Rightly or wrongly, then, they are so accounted in these pages.

Of course, as soon as we begin to define limits, there must be exclusions, and in the case of fox-hunting countries we leave out, of necessity, such famous hunts as the Grafton, the Duke of Beaufort's, the Vale of White Horse, and many others that yield sport as good as any that the Shires can show. Old Oxford men, too, will never be quite content to speak of the Bicester, the country of Mostyn and Griff Lloyd, and of Drake, and, in later times, of Lords Valentia and Chesham, as provincial.

To many who came from Kent, Surrey, or Hampshire to hunt with the Bicester, the experience opened out to them a bright vision of a flying country. The first gallop over such country lives indeed in our minds with the thrills of first love and any other delightful epoch of our lives. Yet in these pages we must leave this and other good countries on one side, not because their foxes are not as stout and straight-necked, or their hounds as keen and brilliant, or the men who follow them as resolute and as well mounted as any in Leicestershire, but because in this, as in all other undertakings, we must draw the line somewhere.

The countries, then, of which this book treats lie in the great grazing districts of the Midlands, in Leicestershire, Northamptonshire, Rutland, and parts of Warwickshire and Lincolnshire. But within these boundaries there is a narrower limit still, for when we speak of the Shires, to many who have hunted in

them all their lives, the term signifies the country round Melton. This is the cream of Leicestershire, and many people never go outside its boundaries for their sport. It is a country not only of grass, but of wide pastures, where there is plenty of room for a horse to extend himself between his fences, where the turf is old and sound, well drained and seldom really deep, except in the wettest seasons. As a rule the going is perfect. A springy green carpet under the horse's feet enables him to lift himself as it were from a spring-board over fences that would otherwise be impracticable, for these are meant to keep in bullocks that can jump as well as many horses, and that will bore through any ordinary fence. These districts are very stiff in places. On the Welham flats, for example, and in parts of the Harborough country the fences are nearly or quite impracticable, but in the cream of the Melton country they are not so big but that a bold horse well ridden can gallop over them. Any day you may see twenty or thirty men and women riding over any part of Leicestershire that is practicable and giving the lead to sixty or seventy others, some of whom are nearly as good. In proportion to the number of people who hunt falls are not numerous, and the results are not so often serious as in other countries.

In this district, most of the coverts are small and artificial. They are carefully placed so as to link together the best stretches of country, and to lead the chase over the most favoured tracts of grass. Let us imagine, for example, that the Pytchley find a fox in Kilworth Sticks. From thence they might run him to Walton Holt, to Bosworth Gorse, Mowsley New Covert, John Ball, Wistow, over the railroad to Norton Gorse, from thence to Botany Bay, and to ground at John O'Gaunt. This is not a likely run, of course,

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but it is quite possible ; it is all over grass, and, with the possible exception of Wistow Park, all the coverts are artificial. Yet the fox would have travelled about twenty miles and crossed from the Pytchley to Mr. Fernie's, run the whole breadth of that hunt, and finished in the Quorn. A man could ride all the way on sound turf, and, if he pleased, jump every fence. It would be possible to trace many other lines as good or even better. This has been chosen simply because every covert and the intervening country are well known to most people who have hunted in Leicestershire.

But neither hounds nor huntsmen would be what they are, nor could sport be what it is, if all the Midland hunting country were like this. There are parts of it as rough as anything in the provinces, and with deep woodlands where stout foxes are bred. These foxes wander far afield in the spring-time, and give those magnificent runs that live in the history of the hunting-field. It is here, in these less well-known and less popular districts, that the actors are made perfect in their parts, and the drama of fox-hunting rehearsed, till on some February morning there is a full dress performance, with some hundreds of the best horsemen and horsewomen in England to see the whole action, or at least to trace the unfolding of the plot.

There must be something in hunting in the Shires which attracts people. Even granting that some people go because others do, because it is the fashion, yet how did Melton or Market Harborough become fashionable ? Their popularity is no new thing. A hundred years ago men crowded to a fixture at Oadby, at Croxton Park, or at Welford, just as they do now, and just as they will do so long as hunting is a sport at all. The fields with the Quorn, the Belvoir, or the

Pytchley in the past, as to-day, were drawn from all England, nay, from all parts of the world.

If we have our Counts Kinsky or Trautsmendorf, or Larische, there was the Russian Matusciowitz, a contemporary of Nimrod and Alvanley, whose name crops up continually in all the memoirs of the early part of the nineteenth century. Nowadays we also have our American and Colonial detachments, for as wealth has grown in those lands, so these descendants of Englishmen come back to the sports of their forefathers, and show that they can hold their own with the best of us in the hunting-field and on the polo ground. But they all come to Melton, or Harborough, or Rugby, because the chance of sport there is better than elsewhere, and because there is more of it.

As we have seen, a country naturally suited for hunting has been improved by the planting of artificial coverts until it is an arena laid out for the purpose of sport. Indeed, large sums are paid every year for the rent and upkeep of coverts and for the fencing of some districts and the taking down of wire in nearly all. But although wire is a danger to those who hunt, and is, indeed, a great hindrance to sport where it exists, yet its appearance is not, save in a very few cases, to be attributed to hostility to fox-hunting, but simply to economic reasons. Wire is used because it is thought to be cheaper, more durable, and more effective than rails or hedges.

There is little hostility to hunting in Leicestershire; indeed, why should there be? There, at all events, its benefits are plain to all. The grass countries of the Midlands, though as a rule, not without a charm of their own, yet have not the attractions of many other parts of England. The climate, though healthy, is cold, and the white fogs which veil the land for days

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in the winter time, to say nothing of the keen east winds, are trying to delicate folk. Leicestershire, then, without hunting would be left to itself, to the making of shoes and stockings and the fattening of beasts. But the hunting season fills it with a gay crowd, who rent the houses, help to pay the rates, buy the produce of the land, and give employment in one way or another to some thousands of people. They fill, too, the whole country-side with life and interest.

Nor is hunting the amusement only of the rich. A few, very few, unwise people of wealth wish that it was, for foxes would not then be so often headed and there would be more room at the fences. But these are mistaken, for the backbone of hunting is in the hundreds of men who have a day with the hounds now and then, in the professional and business men from the towns, in the sprinkling of well-mounted farmers, and in those who see what they can of the sport on a bicycle, on foot, or in a cart.

No one with eyes to see, who watches hunting and its followers, can doubt for a moment that in Leicestershire, at least, it is not only a rich man's sport. The rich man, of course, will have the best of it, but that is the way of the world ; and no one would ever grudge a man a good horse if he could ride it worthily and well for twenty minutes over a grass country.

Hunting in the Midlands is everybody's sport according to their means ; therefore there is no likelihood that there will be hostility to it, nor will wire increase. On the contrary, as we ride about, we think we see signs that it will, in the future, become less necessary. Every year more fences are being cut and laid, and the work is being better done. A good blackthorn hedge, with the top binders twisted, will stop most bullocks, as it will certainly turn a horse

over if he chances it ; and in this rich soil blackthorn grows rapidly and strongly. Thus, if, as it is not unreasonable to think, there are better times in store for the land, what is more natural than that with prosperity the farmer and grazier should take to hunting, seeing that it is his natural recreation, since the sport is at its best when his work is least urgent ? A large field of farmers, we may remember, means a small area of wire ; and, at least while damage funds are sustained and wisely expended, wire can be held in check. It is in any case rather a detriment to our pleasure and a danger to our lives and limbs than an actual menace to hunting, since the sport goes very merrily after all.

In the Shires, at least, there is one sign that hunting is still popular. There are plenty of foxes, far more indeed I should say than at any previous period in the history of fox-hunting. All the season through, from October to April, there are always foxes for us to hunt, and what is more, there are no long pauses while foxes are sought for. If one covert is drawn blank, we can trot a mile or so to the next. No one is uneasy ; and we never whisper about a blank day. People have been heard to say that there are too many foxes in the Midlands ; but, with old Peter Beckford, I think they might just as well complain of having too much money. Those who, like the writer, have lived and hunted in countries where foxes are scarce, and where you may draw the livelong day and never hear a hound till it is too late to hunt, or, it may be, never touch on the line of a fox all day, will appreciate the advantage of being sure of finding a fox whenever you want one.

The uncertainties of fox-hunting are no doubt part of the pleasure, but we cannot enjoy even the uncertainties, the ups and downs of the fortunes of the

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chase, without a fox. It is true, of course, that we seldom kill the fox we started with ; that two or three, or even more, foxes go to make up a run. Now, if I were hunting hounds myself, I should regret the change both for the sake of the pack and for my own, but among the followers, even the man who cares for the working of hounds will generally know nothing of the change, as it is sometimes difficult even for an experienced eye to detect a fox that has been hunted. It is only if we watch the pack closely that, from the added eagerness of their manner in the chase, as they change from the fading line of a weary animal to the fresh scent of the lately found fox, we can infer a change at all. And this change is an imaginary evil, for when we go home at night after hunting all the day, our satisfaction is greater than if we had spent half our time looking for a fox. We have had two horses out, and each of them has done a fair day's work ; and what more can we desire ?

Not only are there always foxes to hunt, but, owing to the small size of the coverts, the hunting is in the open, so that, even if it is not a very good hunting day, we can see all that is going on. On some days hounds absolutely fly, for over these big pastures there is nothing to stop them, and they flit through or over the fences in a wonderful manner.

The courage and determination of a foxhound in forcing his way over or through a stiff country is simply marvellous. The obstacles seem fairly to melt before his single-hearted resolution to drive forward as long as the scent holds. We may well be galloping our very best and yet not be able to hold our own. I have seen hounds more than once three fields ahead—and Leicestershire pastures, remember, run to many acres, and are indeed often the size of a small estate—

while never a horse could draw near to the pack as they flew on, yet those horses had the best blood in England in their veins, and the condition which two or three seasons of hard food and hard work had given them.

It is this constant work in the open which is one of the charms of the Shires. The prizes in the lottery of scent, too, are more often drawn here than elsewhere. It is, then, because men can always hunt and always, when there or thereabouts of course, see what is going on, and because the chances of a run are greatly increased by the fact that if there is a scent there is nearly certain to be a fox, that people are drawn to the Shires in their thousands.

But the reader is not to suppose that there are no drawbacks to hunting in Leicestershire. In the first place, there are the hills. The Midlands are not, as many people picture them, a wide tract of level grass. In the neighbourhood of Market Harborough, for example, the flats by Welham are almost the only very level districts, all the rest being a sea of rolling waves of grass and hills, more or less steep and almost equally trying to a horse, whether he has to gallop up or down them. Parts of the Cottesmore country are even more abrupt; and the Tilton district, though excellent for sport, is desperately hard on horses. The Pytchley is, indeed, in some parts flatter, but then the pastures are less extensive, and the fences, always stiff, seem even more forbidding when they come more frequently in our way. But even in the valleys and on the hills the ground under our feet is not smooth. Everywhere the fields are in what is called ridge and furrow. If, as we have said, the whole district is of rolling waves of grass, every field has ripples across its surface, sometimes long like a swell, and sometimes short like a

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chopping sea. This is said to be a relic of the days when corn was worth growing and every field was a ploughed one.

It is trying to the best of horses, ruinous to the inferior ones, and unless you can gallop through it sideways or the lengthwise of the furrows, it adds very much to the effects of pace in distressing a horse. A straight-shouldered horse with upright pasterns is a misery to ride. He pitches and rolls like a small boat in a cross sea, and long before the end of the day the unaccustomed rider is almost as beaten as the horse.

There is yet another disadvantage which arises from the hills and the ridge and furrow. In a hilly country with an uneven surface foxes are apt to run short, for a fox is an adept at crossing the open without being seen. He knows well how to take advantage of every depression in the ground and thus to escape observation. So unless a fox is pressed hard he can turn and twist as he likes, and thus make his way back to the covert from which he started. Even if scent is good and hounds can drive along after a fox, he will run over only as much country as he knows, turning back when he reaches its limits. This I believe to be true of all foxes without exception, for when a hunted fox reaches the limit of his nightly ranges, he will seek to return.

Long runs, then, are the result of two causes. First, when the fox is a traveller away from home. In the early spring, dog foxes travel far; and, when found, they will return as fast as they can and generally in a straight line. In the other case, a great run is the result of more or less frequent changes, and hence it will be but seldom crowned with a kill. When this occurs, indeed, it is often claimed that the fox killed is the original one found. Jim, the first whipper-in

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as likely as not, is quite sure it is the same. "I took partic'lar notice of the size of his tag," or "I saw he was a very little 'un when I viewed 'un." This is often said in good faith, though sometimes the wish is father to the thought, or it may be prompted by a glance from the huntsman.

In Leicestershire, no doubt, where foxes are very numerous, and where, moreover, as the season goes on, they are much scattered, the chances are greatly in favour of a change. "If you run twenty minutes in Leicestershire," once said a well-known Master of Hounds, "it is more than an even chance that you have hunted two foxes at least." Nevertheless, there are authentic, though rare, instances of hounds hunting the same fox for a long time and to a far distant point. "We were hunting for two hours and a half and never touched a covert," we may sometimes hear one of the field assert. That, however, proves nothing, for, as I have already pointed out, foxes in an open winter lie in the hedgerows and furrows near the smaller spinneys; and especially is this the case towards the end of the season, when the foxes have been well disturbed.

In spite, however, of all drawbacks, the Shires remain the best hunting grounds in the world. Nor is this only on account of the natural advantages of the country for hunting, for they attract to themselves the best huntsmen. There are no hunting countries where the sport depends so much on the huntsman as in those of the Midlands. It is true that if hounds are left to themselves *without a crowd behind them* they will show excellent sport and kill many foxes, but it is far otherwise when they have several hundred eager men and women following them. In the Shires, then, a huntsman cannot leave his hounds to themselves in

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many cases where it would be wise to do so in a provincial country. He has to keep them, if possible, clear of the crowd. To cast back if they have overrun the scent is impossible. The field are over the line in a moment, for, as Whyte-Melville says, if they give the hounds fifty yards that is considered liberal. If, then, the fox is not forward, or has not turned on one side or the other, he is lost, and the shortest plan is to go and look for another. To say that all huntsmen under such conditions make mistakes is but to say they are human ; but he who makes the fewest is the best.

Now, as this book has been written to offer advice to those whose minds are fixed on hunting in the grass countries, we may pause to consider who those are who will be likely to go there. To give visitors the first place, we shall see foreigners who wish to know what English fox-hunting is like, and who, when they have bought their experience, prove good men and true over a country ; and there will be Americans and Colonials who have a weakness and liking for the best of everything.

These will, as a matter of course, come to Leicestershire, and they will, if they are wise, go to Melton or Market Harborough. Their wives will certainly prefer the former. It is more lively and social at Melton. There is a *carrière ouverte aux talents*, only, be it remembered, the talents must be the golden if the reward is to be obtained.

To all, whether English born or hailing from other lands, the question has to be decided whether you determine to go into the Midlands as an actor or a spectator of the drama of hunting.

Of the many people who stick in the gaps and jam the gateways probably not a few are merely spectators.

They have not, and never had, any intention of taking a leading part in the hunting-field. Why, then, are they there? Simply because our hunting countries are very pleasant places to spend the winter in. The society is that of London in the season, and is the best and pleasantest in the world. Its faults and its virtues are the same in both places; and we enjoy the one and endure the other as best we may.

There is for every day its occupation set down by fashion. You need never ask, "What shall I do to-day?" for, having come to Melton, the question is answered for you. "To-day we meet at Six Hills, or Knossington, or Croxton Park," as the case may be. The life is a healthy one; the exercise pleasant; and you are sure of an appetite and pleasant company at dinner and of a game of bridge afterwards, if your tastes lie that way. A man who has money and some well-mannered horses can, even if he is not an enthusiast about hunting, have a capital time at Melton. He ought never to be bored; he ought to eat well and sleep well and to be sufficiently amused. There is much of hunting talk it is true, as is natural, but only among the enthusiasts. Others can talk of what they please, and hear, if they are so minded, the latest gossip of their set.

These people form a large proportion of the winter visitors. They supply much of the money and a good deal of the society of hunting, and are a useful addition to our hunting-fields, so long at least as they abstain from using motors to come to the fixtures with. A motor is no doubt a useful thing in its place, and possibly a delightful way of taking the air, but surely the smallest appreciation of the æsthetic and historic aspect of hunting must make any one see that it is out of place at a hunting gathering. Then they

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are really a danger when we consider the number of led horses in the height of condition that are on the roads on a hunting morning. These horses are full of life, and many of them are already in a state of nervous excitement at the prospect of the day before them. Under ordinary circumstances they may be perfectly quiet with motors; they might indeed meet a motor coming towards them with equanimity. The real danger, even with a fairly steady horse, is when the rapidly driven automobile comes up from behind. If our friends who drive—always, of course, within the speed limit—would only remember, passing from behind at what an automobilist calls eight miles an hour is far more alarming to the horse and his rider than if he meets them. For it is not that animals are as a rule afraid of automobiles; it is that a high couraged horse is apt to be startled by anything that comes up from behind with some rattle and at what seems to the horse to be a great pace. Then the rider has to be considered; and he is often more afraid than the horse, and thus communicates his fear to the animal. This is a digression, but not altogether an irrelevant one if it helps the automobilist to understand and respect the prejudices and fears of the horseman, to many of whom still his carriage is a strange and fearsome sort of fowl.

To return, however, to our topic as to what people should come to the grass countries to hunt. We have already indicated one class; those who come for a pleasant, healthy winter society. For the rest, hunting men may be roughly divided into three classes. There are those, whether in the first flight or not, who mean to ride hard, and do so. This class includes the very few who can ride anywhere on almost any horse, however disagreeable, that is physically capable of

covering a country after hounds. These men are few, though possibly Mr. Assheton Smith was one in spite of the fact that he was certainly defeated once. Dick Christian and Dick Webster could have ridden horses that few of us would care to try, but their mounts, if raw and young, were generally good in quality and power. I think, too, I have known two such men in my time ; but, as they are still living, I will not mention them, though their names will easily be guessed by those who have hunted in Leicestershire within the last twenty years.

The second class are those who understand hunting, like to ride to hounds, can and will cross any ordinary country at a fair pace, but who cannot tackle Leicestershire fences at Leicestershire pace, because their nerves, though excellent within certain limits, fail them before the stiff rails and the well-laid blackthorn, not to speak of occasional oxers and bullfinches. Even Whyte-Melville felt this, so he who pleads guilty may feel he has good company. There are also those who cannot mount themselves for Leicestershire, either because they cannot pay for the horses they could ride, or cannot ride the horses they could pay for. It is useless for ordinary mortals, who may be fairly good across country, to attempt to live with hounds over the grass on second-rate horses. They will only lame their horses and lose their own nerve. "The good country hunter here proves a brute," because all horses are bad fencers when they are blown. A friend proved the truth of this, for he had gone well in several countries, and when he came down into the Shires brought with him two horses on which he had held a good place in a by no means easy provincial country. These horses jumped well enough, but they could not go the pace, and they fell at last because

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they were beaten. "After three falls in one day I sold them, and with some big blood horses in Melton condition saw plenty of sport and had no fall," he wrote, when telling of his experience. But if no other horses had been forthcoming, or there had been no money to buy them with, the chances are my friend would have left Leicestershire a worse man to hounds than when he came.

The third class consists of those who do not mean to jump, but who love the sport for all that. They include those who are past their prime; those who have lost their nerve or never had any; those who are bad horsemen and know it, but prefer to call it want of nerve; and the men who like to see a run and are not particularly afraid of falling, but who never get any fun if they really try to ride to hounds. Such men might, if they were rich and had the gift of common-sense, so that they had nothing but perfect-mannered horses in their boxes, do fairly well in the Shires. They cannot, however, steer an indifferent animal over a big country.

Now of these three classes, the first and the last will probably have more fun in the grass countries than anywhere else. The first, because the open country enables them to see more of hounds and their work, and the sound turf enables them to gallop faster and to jump bigger fences with more safety than they could do elsewhere. The fact that there are many foxes, too, enables them to see more hunting in the course of a day than is possible in other countries. Very little time is wasted in looking for the fox, for if he is not in one place he is sure to be in another. More often than not, if once the hunt is started it goes on, with a short interval for changing horses and lunch, until it is too dark to see. There are few long and

weary draws, with the chance of being slipped at last, and blank days are unknown, save when the weather is too bad to hunt at all and even the very keenest Masters are obliged to go home. Yet even in the most unpromising weather the fashionable packs will often give you a chance to see sport if you care to risk your horse's legs and your own limbs. There is seldom a day without some sort of a gallop, and walking and trotting after a fox are unknown, for if a pack can hunt at all, they can generally go fast enough to keep their followers moving.

Thus, the first and second flight men who honestly mean to ride the line, though this is not always possible in Leicestershire even for the boldest, have more sport and more fun than they could possibly obtain elsewhere. For men of the very first class like Whyte-Melville's young Rapid, Leicestershire is a perfect hunting ground. Every one knows the "Riding Recollections," yet if there should be any reader who does not, then I certainly will not spoil his pleasure by quoting from it. Yet I have never seen it remarked how perfectly young Rapid's education and training fitted him for taking and keeping, as he did, the first place in a fast run over a grass country. He was, as we learn from the chapter on the Provinces, the son of a country gentleman who was Master of a pack of hounds, apparently somewhere in the remote West. In the intervals of education, in the Eton holidays and Oxford vacations, he had the opportunity at home of learning the science of woodcraft and of hound work. Nor were these early lessons lost. No doubt he had run with the beagles at Eton, and from Oxford had seen Lord Macclesfield draw Stowe wood, or watched Squire Hall hunting the Heythrop bitches on the "let 'em alone" principle over the stone-wall country.

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How wild those bitches were too sometimes, but oh, how they raced when there was a scent. I can remember forty minutes one afternoon—but that would be a digression, though I plead guilty to still feeling the charm of those Oxford days. Lord Valentia and the Bicester would also help to teach him to ride; and the reader will note how the training bore fruit, how the quick resolve enabled him to obtain a start, how by putting on pace at the right moment he cleared the yawning bottom, how he took a pull on the plough, and how he steadied his horse at the brook. The very first place is only given to those who have the knowledge and have had the training. Hunting was a second nature to young Rapid, and such men we can never beat, for they will always have the best of a good thing. These men have fewer falls than others. Indeed, considering the fences they ride over and the pace they go, we are inclined to believe that the top-o-the-hunt is the safest place. To well mounted men who have horsemanship enough, the Shires, then, will be the paradise of hunting.

Strange to say, the other class who have more fun here than elsewhere, are those who never jump. If these will ride handy horses that can stay in a hilly country, are quick on their legs and can gallop fast, such unambitious folk can see much. They will, however, have to work hard, to learn the country and to be handy with gates, and, like their betters, be able to make up their minds quickly. I have said they will have to work hard, for, though Leicestershire is the best-gated country in England, nevertheless hounds, or rather foxes, will not always take the line of least resistance to our progress. So the riders must diverge from the true line of the chase sometimes to avoid fences, and then gallop their best to get back to

their place. If Lord Gardner's estimate is correct, that it takes as much out of a horse to jump a big fence with fourteen stone on his back as to gallop over half a big pasture, the horses of the non-jumpers will have done at least as much work as those of the leaders at the end of the day. In all probability they will have done more if we reckon the steadying at the muddy gateways, the loss of the pulls which those in front can take advantage of when hounds waver or turn towards them, or during those infinitesimal checks of which those in the rear know nothing, and if we consider, too, the extra distance travelled. The tribe of the Jorrocksites want two horses out, and good ones in their way, just as much as do the first flight men, and they will see much sport and have their share of lucky days. To speak from my own experience, I have galloped for two miles alongside the hounds from a certain famous covert, through a line of gates which my leader threw open; and, again, a well-known Leicestershire farmer told me the other day that he had ridden for some miles of one of the famous hunts of the season 1902-3, and never left the hounds, and yet never had occasion to jump.

These are the good days, but there are, of course, the bad ones, when hounds are always turning away from us. Still, from the nature of the country, the wide prospects and the fact that hounds are generally in the open, also because there are many gates and many bridle paths, Leicestershire is unequalled for those who like to see something of hounds and who do not mind galloping down hill as well as up, or going over rough ground as well as smooth, and who, at the same time, possess temperate horses.

The intermediate class of whom I have spoken will, on the other hand, have much more fun in the pro-

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vinces. There they may, if they have chosen wisely, be leaders, and they may be of opinion that it is better to reign in hell than to serve in a better place. The average man will, at any rate, find himself outclassed and outpaced in the Midlands, and will be bothered by the crowd and puzzled by the country.

This brings us to a characteristic of Leicestershire hunting which is frequently urged as a drawback. This is the crowd. That, however, it is not an insuperable obstacle, the continued existence of hunting tells us. Were it so, hunting must have already ceased to exist. The continued cry of those who hunt in the grass countries is that the crowd "has increased, is still increasing, and ought to be diminished." We all join in the cry, forgetting that we ourselves are the crowd. We all think it would be an excellent thing if other people would hunt elsewhere and leave more room for us. The question is: Who is to go? The residents cannot; the visitors will not; and the casual sportsmen are not really very numerous. If the residents gave up hunting, it would be bad for the sport, for they guide local public opinion in its favour. Individually, it is true, they may seem to be a feeble folk, but collectively they are a power, and they have family or business connections all over the district. If the visitors ceased to come, there would be a lack of funds to carry on the sport, but now, though subscriptions are increased, people pay them. The crowd, moreover, has always been a characteristic of the grass countries, and probably always will be.

There are some tendencies of modern life, too, which help to drive people to the Midlands for sport with hounds. Among others, the area and opportunities of provincial hunts are yearly becoming fewer and more circumscribed. The spread of towns, the turning of

country villages near them into suburbs by the building of villas, also the decay of the smaller gentry, the poverty of the farmers and the increase of shooting tenancies are all adverse to hunting in many places, where it has hitherto flourished. Anyway, in the Midlands the crowd is there and must be made the best of by its own members. There is, indeed, only one remedy for those who dislike it, only one way of diminishing the throng, and that is by staying away.

Elsewhere I shall have occasion to dwell on the necessity of quickness in getting a start and on the dangers of delay if we would not lose the sport we have come out to see, yet the multitude of people bent on attaining the same object constitutes a great difficulty in the way of acting on this advice. For, strange to say, however much they may hang back and potter later, every one is in a hurry to make a start. There is a rush, awe-inspiring to those who share in it, but a fine sight in its way, when a whole field of some three or four hundred gallop round a covert. Fortunately their own haste soon solves the difficulty, for four-fifths will be jammed in the first gateway or blocked hopelessly at the nearest gap. An ounce of rashness is then worth a pound of discretion, for two or three big fences and a couple of miles' gallop, and the difficulty is over for that run, and possibly for the day. After a time, even the gates are passable if you reach them soon enough, and if hounds run there will not be actually more than half-a-dozen in the next field to them, and half as many again a few hundreds yards behind. A hunting crowd melts away in a wonderful manner when the country is open. A wired district, however, will soon bring them together again, and good, bad, and indifferent riders will once more be choking the gates.

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In every run there will be the first and second flight men and women who are riding the line, the rearguard scattered behind and the flanking divisions on the right and on the left who are skirting for gates and gaps, and hoping for a turn in their favour. When the turn comes, one half of them will necessarily be left behind. About one o'clock many who perchance have been going well will drop off, and by half-past two or three the remnant of the field left will be of a manageable size.

In some of the grass countries the crowd is more easily absorbed than in others. In the Quorn, for example, there is room to ride abreast, while in the Cottesmore the steep hills and the holding scent will scatter the throng. In the Pytchley, on the other hand, owing to the nature of the country, the crowd is always more in evidence. But even in Leicestershire or Northamptonshire it is not obligatory to hunt in a crowd. It is only on fashionable days, such as the Cottesmore Tuesday, the Pytchley Wednesday, or the Quorn Friday, that the masses are so overwhelming, and of these days the Pytchley Wednesday is perhaps the worst because it is for so many the only accessible hunt on that day. Melton, indeed, can hunt with the Belvoir ; but Market Harborough, Rugby, and Leicester, not to speak of all the villages round about, must either hunt with the Pytchley or stay at home. It is true that these days are in the very best country, but still if you avoid them your average of sport during the season may be on the whole as good if not better than if you went out and did not do well.

If you would see the fashionable countries on their best days under the most favourable aspects, then the wisest plan is to keep the best horse for the afternoon, and make a long day. In the evening during the

latter part of the season, when the day perchance is clouded over, the scent is often at its best, the "crowd" has gone home, and those who stay mean to ride. The hounds are not tired, for the condition of the hound in the Shires is as perfect as that of the horses, and they will do their work all the better for the absence of the thunder of many hoofs behind them. Even the hardest and most jealous riders can now afford to give them plenty of room. Now, if there is a travelling fox, you will see what a first-rate run over the best of the grass is like, nor will you think that the charms of the Midlands as a hunting district have been exaggerated.

Thus we are able to answer the question, "Who should go to the Midlands to hunt?" I should indeed be inclined to advise every one to have at least one season in the grass countries. It is a part of a hunting man's education which should not be neglected. There he will see the best horses and the finest horsemen of the day. He cannot fail either, if he is observant, to learn a great deal. Doubtless, however, in many cases the season will only be a single one, for considerations of money or of duty may keep many away who would enjoy the sport. Yet there are undoubtedly some people who hunt in the Shires who ought not to be there, and this not because they are not in every way suited to the sport, but because they ought to be elsewhere. For while the crowds which threaten the prosperity of hunting in the Midlands are weakening the fortunes of hunting elsewhere, we may be allowed to remark that men who have property in other countries ought to be taking their share in the duties of local government, and helping to support the pastimes of their neighbours and their tenants.

It has been said that hunting in Leicestershire spoils

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us for hunting elsewhere, but if this is true, it is because we are not sportsmen at heart. Every kind of country has its peculiar charm and its particular interests. In the Shires the sport is different, but not perhaps greater than in the provinces if we really love hunting, and there is no doubt at all that a very large number of men and women would be far happier in a provincial country than in Leicestershire. They would see more sport and would come to understand it better. With the best will in the world, a man may hunt half a lifetime in the Midlands, and know very little about hunting at the end of it. This is not possible in the provinces, for there, unless he learns something of hunting, he will scarcely persevere for long.

Yet, with all deductions, there are still a great number of people who will find the Shires the best place to hunt in. The visitors from other countries, of whom we have already spoken, soldiers on leave from India or elsewhere, business men who want a gallop, all, in fact, who can and will ride and are their own masters, as well as those who love the social side and yet have a real affection for the sport itself, all these will, as I have said, find the Shires a paradise.

Two things show that this is, indeed, only sober truth: the size and variety of our fields, and the increasing numbers of people who buy or lease houses in the Midlands and make them their home for a considerable part of each year.

MELTON



CHAPTER II

A WEEK AT MELTON

Choice of Centres—The Railways—Rise of Melton—The Old Club—Hunting Boxes—Hotels—Ladies in the Hunting Field—Society—Number of Horses required—Going with the Crowd—Dress—Expenditure—Economies—Hunting late in the Season—Advantages of Melton—Surrounding Villages—How to spend the Week—Monday with the Quorn—Description of the Country hunted—Tuesday with the Cottesmore—The Crowd—The Tilton and Owston Coverts—Wednesday with the Belvoir—Famous men who have hunted with the Belvoir—"Oxers" and "Bullfinches"—Croxtan Park—Notable Belvoir Coverts—The Brooks—Thursday's choice: Mr. Fernie's or the Cottesmore—Vale of Catmore—Arthur Thatcher—Friday with the Quorn—The Foxes and the Crowd—An Essex Sportsman's account—Going to the Meet—Scraptoft—Gaddesby—Prince of Wales's Gorse—Lowesby Hall: Lord Waterford's Feat—When to Jump and when to avoid Jumping—Knowledge of the Country—Saturday in the Melton country of the Cottesmore—The Essex Sportsman again quoted.

IF the reader has made up his mind to have one or more seasons in the Midlands, he will naturally wish to know where to go, and it is the purpose of the following chapters to put before him the advantages and drawbacks of the different places from which he has to choose. I have adopted the plan of taking my reader to centres rather than to particular hunts, because that is the natural and inevitable course for the newcomer. There is much variety in the Shires, and by going to certain recognised hunting centres he

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will see the different packs in their best country, and thus be able to decide with which particular hunt he will throw in his lot. By the time he has had this experience he will require no assistance from any one in making up his mind.

The various towns of which I am going to write have become fashionable resorts for hunting people because they are so situated that the best meets of the most famous packs are within reach from them. The visitor to Melton, Market Harborough, or Rugby is not by any means tied to one pack. Rather he will skim the cream of several hunts. There is no doubt that Melton is the first thought of every one who contemplates a visit to the Shires, for its advantages are obvious to any one who will take a map and draw a circle of ten miles round the town. He will find that within that radius is some of the very best country for hunting over that Leicestershire or Rutland affords. If he knows anything of hunting history, he will recognise names of coverts that are household words wherever hunting is talked of, coverts that are connected with the great riders, the able huntsmen, and the historic runs of the past. It may also occur to him that from Melton he can hunt six days a week, yet never breakfast at an uncomfortably early hour and seldom reach home too late for dinner.

He will also note that if he desires to visit more distant packs the joint railways, the L. & N.W. and the G.N.R., will be quite ready to give him a day with Mr. Fernie's or the Pytchley, if he should think the former too far to ride or drive to, or if, on the other hand, he desires to pit himself against the hard riders that wear the famous white collar. Every one who has thought of hunting from Melton has probably read Brooksby's story of the "Best Season on Record,"

and he will remember the picture of the Melton man in a flowered dressing-gown leaning over the banisters with the order, "Hey, Johnson, breakfast in half-an-hour, and *order me a train*. I'll hunt with Sir Bache."

The flourishing town we now see was little more than a village until Mr. Cecil Forester, drawn by its convenience for hunting alike with Mr. Meynell's Hounds and the Belvoir, went there for the hunting season. When once this discovery was made the growth of the place was rapid, and before many years Melton became the chief hunting centre of England; and from that day to this there has been a steady flow of fashion and wealth to it. For, apart from its attractions as a sporting centre, it is a pleasant town enough, finely situated and embosomed in a rich vale through which flows the river Wreake. It has a fine church, the tower of which, as Nimrod observed, "is often a grateful sight to a returning sportsman on a beaten horse."

For a long time, indeed, Melton was a place where men only gathered for hunting. "The grand feature of Melton Mowbray," says the writer quoted above, "is the Old Club." This house has long ceased to exist as a club, and the building has now been turned into a shop. One of the chief features of Melton architecture are the handsome hunting-boxes which have been built on the outskirts of the town, and are comfortable but unpretentious places, many of them only differing from suburban houses elsewhere by the handsome ranges of stabling attached to them. For however modestly the owner may be lodged, he is sure to see that his horses have spacious and comfortable ranges of boxes. Some of these houses are to let every year, others again belong to those regular visitors

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who have not missed a Melton season for a score or more of years past.

For those who cannot afford a house, or who prefer the absence of care and responsibility that accompany housekeeping, there are some excellent hotels, such as the George, the Bell, and the Harborough Arms. These are generally full during the winter months, and the man who would secure rooms must take time by the forelock in engaging them. Besides the hotels, there are comfortable lodgings to be had, as well as ranges of stabling with quarters for the grooms, which latter are let separately, and are found convenient by those who do not wish, or are not able, to take up their abode in the town for the whole winter.

Melton was at first a place where ladies were seldom or never seen. For in the early days of the last century, while Melton was still not quite sure whether its prosperity depended on its Stilton cheeses and the excellence of its pork pies, or on the patronage of its hunting visitors, ladies as a rule did not and could not hunt. The old style of side-saddle made it difficult, if not impossible, for a woman to ride over a country with safety, and the modern saddlers have done as much as any one to make hunting the popular sport for women that it is to-day. In its earlier years, then, when Melton society existed entirely for hunting, every one hunted six days a week or was supposed to do so, and, as the riders often larked home across country after a bad day, very large studs were required. In this respect the coming of ladies to Melton has brought about a change. It is no longer absolutely necessary to hunt every day, for there is much society for those who are able to enter into it. Indeed some people say there is too much, and that the pleasant dinners and bridge parties interfere with hunting.

Nevertheless, though it is pleasant to do as other people, it is not perhaps essential to copy them in all things.

For those who mean to hunt four or five days a week I should say that six good horses, and a polo pony or two to ride or drive, are a minimum stable. Nevertheless, if you are bent on seeing Melton with a smaller stud you can always have business in London if the stable runs short, or Mr. Hames of Leicester or Mr. Cowley of Braybrooke near Market Harborough will mount you as well or better than you can do it yourself. Like all other centres of English society nowadays, that of the hunting towns has become very large. The latter has, of course, its sets and divisions, but no one troubles about your affairs, and you can ride hard or not as you please and dress as you like without attracting attention.

Nevertheless, wherever he goes, the wise man will try not to differ from the crowd. No one, for instance, would wear a cap or butcher-boots with a pink coat, or go out without a thong to his crop. I imagine too that he would not have a bridle with buckles, or anything but a plain flapped saddle, or put a breastplate on his horse. He should be prepared also to subscribe liberally to at least three packs of hounds.

It is perhaps possible to hunt nearly as inexpensively in the grass countries as elsewhere, but still no one would choose Melton with a view to economy. The visitor who makes use of the country for his pleasure ought certainly to pay for the advantages to obtain which he has left his own country. For if fox-hunting is to continue and to prosper in the Midlands, it can only do so by having its advantages made clear to the people of the district. Everything then that can possibly be purchased in the place should be

bought there, though this will add something to our expenses.

Altogether, the necessary expense of a season at Melton will mount up to a very considerable sum. But if the question be asked "How much?" this must of course depend on the scale on which the thing is done.

Still there are ways by which one can reduce the total. To begin with, only a part of the season may be spent there. A very great many people do not come to Melton till after Christmas, and some only for the last two months of the season. Now, February is generally, and March often, a good time for sport. With regard to the latter month, it is frequently as good as any in the Midlands, and is nearly always better there than elsewhere. When other countries are dried up and hunting has ceased to be a pleasure, the grass of the Midlands still carries a scent and affords good going to the horse. Towards the end of the season, too, the evening runs are often first-rate, and as the Masters generally draw as long as there is light, there are many excellent gallops after the "crowd" has gone home.

If a man is prepared to spend the money, has from six to ten really good horses, and is able to hunt four or five days a week, then Melton is an admirable centre.

Hitherto I have supposed that only a visit to Melton is contemplated, but if it is intended to come there every year, then the best and cheapest plan in the end is to buy or take the lease of a house and furnish. For, although the rent for the season of a well-furnished hunting-box is large, yet house rent in the Melton district for unfurnished houses on lease is not extravagant. There are comfortable houses in and round Melton to suit most tastes, and it is infinitely more

pleasant and more comfortable to hunt from one's own house than from lodgings or an hotel.

It has been said that the day of Melton is passing, that the town has been invaded by manufactories, that it is too crowded, and that the society is somewhat mixed. But granted that there is some truth in these objections, still there is no other place that can give so much hunting over such a good country with so little road work and so many advantages as Melton, and it remains, in spite of all deductions, the best hunting centre in the world.

For those who do not like to live in or near a town, there are many pleasant villages round Melton, in which a good many well-known hunting people pitch their tents. According as we choose one or other of these, we shall find of course that the advantage of the central position of Melton is to a certain extent lost. Two or three miles, indeed, is not a long distance, but it is an appreciable addition to the evening ride home when we and our horses are tired. On the other hand, to the sociable person who dislikes a solitary evening, the town is the pleasanter place. But we will suppose that this important point has been settled, that Melton with its good shops and convenient railway service is your choice, and that you have plenty of horses. Now, we will proceed to consider how the week is to be spent and what kind of country you will find to ride over on each successive day.

The regular Melton man begins his week with the Quorn as a matter of course. Indeed, although but two days or occasionally three days of the week are spent with this pack, yet it is the hunt to which he belongs, whose uniform he wears in the field and in the ball-room, and whose are the initials Q.H. that he is proud to wear on his buttons. He will hunt

with the other packs as a visitor ; of the Quorn he is a member. On Monday, then, he rides with the Quorn, and he will find the hounds at no great distance as a rule from the stable door. Much of the Monday country, which lies north of the Wreake, is at its best near Melton, though the farther north we travel, the rougher, the wilder, and the deeper becomes the character of the district. Nor is the latter much favoured by the more fastidious sportsmen. Six Hills or Seg's Hill, is, as Brooksby has well put it, the Croydon Junction of the Quorn country. In Sir Richard Sutton's day, if hounds went north of Six Hills to draw the Widmerpool country, many men would turn their horses homewards. " These Melton gentlemen are wonderfully afraid of a little dirt," was Sir Richard's remark, as he trotted off to Widmerpool with a much diminished following. But, after all, we hunt to amuse ourselves, and if we do not like sticky plough and boggy lanes, or ten-acre enclosures, there is small blame to us if we turn homeward and save our horse for another day and a better country. Moreover, every man knows his own stable secrets, and the horse that may be gay and safe on the springy turf may flounder and fall on deep ground.

What the hard riding division go out for on Monday is, first, a gallop over the beautiful grass lines near Hoby or Ragdale or over the Belvoir Vale. South of Six Hills is the Hoby Vale, which is not far from being the most delightful line in the Shires. But this, the best of the Monday country, is not to be played with. For if the turf carries, as I believe it does, a better scent than elsewhere, and if the pastures are pleasant to gallop over, they are divided by fences which are stiff and strong. There are, too, here and there oxers to test the boldness of the horses and the courage of



AT THE COVERTSIDE WITH THE QUORN

the riders, but these are diminishing as time decays their stout ox rails and in their place comes the strand of wire, to guard the fence from the bullocks. The latter, thanks to the farmers, is generally taken down in the hunting season, and the way is thus left open where in earlier times it was closed to all but the few.

On this side of the Quorn country are a number of artificial coverts which hold foxes and are separated by only short distances. Thus we find a chain of places, each of which is strong enough to hold a fox, but not large enough to detain the pack long if they are running. It is, moreover, a grass country as long as we are on the Melton side of Widmerpool. For this Monday country belongs particularly to Melton, since it is near no other centre ; and, though part of it overlooks the Belvoir Vale, yet there are no places of any size along its borders. That this is considered a very typical country may be gathered from the fact that when the present King desired to have a quiet day so as to see what the Quorn was really like, it was Ragdale that was chosen for the bye-day, when starting to hunt with the snow on the ground at three o'clock they had a rare gallop to Schoby Scholes from Cossington Gorse.

But, of all the Monday fixtures, Kirby Gate stands first. As to the usual term "meet," I rather agree with the old sportsman who when asked where the meet was, replied with grim humour, "A boiled leg of mutton, sir, will be on my table at four o'clock, and I hope you will do me the pleasure to sit down to it, *but* if you mean the fixture of my hounds they will be at so and so."

For many years Kirby Gate with the Quorn has been looked on as the formal opening of the hunting season. It has come to be an annual holiday for Leicester, and

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a crowd gathers second only to the assembly that greets the opening day of the Devon and Somerset on Cloutsham Ball. To the pleasures of this opening day hunting in Leicestershire owes something of its strong hold on the people. From Kirby Gate the first covert drawn is Gartree. The hill above the covert forms a natural gallery from whence the foot people and cyclists, the occupants of the brakes and carriages, can see the sport and be scarcely any hindrance at all. Gartree Hill is always full of foxes, being part of the Hartopp property. Therefore a find here is a certainty, and a run over the Burton flats and very often round by Leesthorpe, or away towards Stapleford, all three in the Cottesmore hunt, is a very usual sequel. This is a beautiful country, all grass and divided by fences that a hunter can jump.

But even in the neighbourhood of Melton itself there is some rough country, and, supposing Wartnaby to be on the card, the stranger may find himself hunting foxes in a rough hilly district scarred with the tram-lines of the Ironstone mines. The rough country, however, will be borne with, for at any moment a fox may lead you away over Belvoir's sweet vale, a hunting ground which, when the going is not too deep, is, as a Belvoir man once said, "the best to ride over in England." To this remark, indeed, some might add that they would like it better if the fences, which made the stout heart of one of the Duke's flying parsons tremble, were not quite so stiff. There is country here which is bothering in a crowd, and notably the rough and broken stretch below Wartnaby itself, where, in many places, you can but take your turn at the practicable places in the very stiff hedges. This experience, however, is likely to be followed by a gallop on the grass by Saxelby or from Welby Fishponds, one of

the coverts nearest to the town of Melton. This covert was a gift to the hunt from the Lord Wilton who ruled Melton socially for so many years.

Not very far off we may see Thrussington Wold drawn, a beautiful little wood of forty acres, and one of the very few natural coverts on this side of the hunt. From here you may ride over some very deep country, and there are, unless memory deceives me, some fields of rough choppy ridge and furrow only equalled by some of the fields between Naseby Woolleys and Naseby spire, in the Pytchley country. Indeed, the best and the worst of countries lie side by side on a Quorn Monday. There may be steep hills, rough ravines and rugged ground crossed by the Ironstone railway, or there may be beautiful grass by Saxelby and Grimston, or, again, grass still, though much cut up into small enclosures and stiffly fenced, as you work northwards to Ellar's and Willoughby Gorses, with, of course, the plough again, cold, sticky and deep, that lies beyond the latter covert. It is hardly possible for ordinary men to take anything like a straight line from Ellar's Gorse to Willoughby. The distance is a mile, but, with a good fox, hounds run across in less than ten minutes, and unless you are in front at the gaps, you will be far behind them at Willoughby.

Another Monday covert is the Curate's Gorse, which owes its favour with Melton to the fact that the line of hills, on which it lies, offers a view of the Vale of Belvoir and not seldom gives a gallop across it to Clawson Thorns, or even, if luck be very great, to Sherbrooke's covert, a glorious forty minutes away. Some who were there will remember the gallop with the Belvoir from the last-named covert to within a hundred yards or so of the Curate's, now nearly a score of years ago. A very varied line this, in which most kinds of

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the Leicestershire fences will meet you, and some un-jumpable obstacles among them.

Farther away in this direction we come to places almost, but not quite, out of the ken of Melton, and among them Bunny Park, once the home of Lord Ranccliffe, whom Nimrod found so pleasant and hospitable, but of whom Sir Horace Rumbold, in his amusing book, gives a less pleasant impression. But then Sir Horace lamed a favourite horse on the day he had from here, and the old Lord was one of the early school of fox-hunters to whom the new generation of diplomatists was scarcely congenial. There also is Prestwold, where Mr. Hussey Packe will show to any one the problem solved of foxes and pheasants living together in peace and amity.

But these places hardly belong to the Monday country. Taking that side of the country as a whole, it has the charm of variety. The foxes too are perhaps stouter than on the other side of the Wreake. The fences, with certain exceptions, are to be jumped by a good hunter without overtaxing his powers, but he must be a hunter well schooled, handy and temperate, and with at least three years of Melton condition. Of the coverts of this side I have not said much, but some are artificial, such as Lord Aylesford's, Cossington Gorse, Ellar's Gorse, and Walton Thorns. The last was planted by Lord Plymouth, and is not to be confounded with Walton Holt, which lies on the border of Mr. Fernie's country. There are some natural woods and coverts like Old Dalby Wood, Thrussington Wolds and Schoby Scholes, not to speak of the more distant and extensive coverts of Kinoulton and Owthorpe, on the Nottinghamshire border, to which Lord Harrington's hounds often came after a Quorn fox that has paid a visit to the South Notts country.

In these days the heart of the visitor to Melton may well beat a little higher at the thought of the sport that awaits him on a Cottesmore Tuesday. It will be the day of the week he will look forward to most eagerly, and turn his thoughts back upon with the most pleasure.

Just at first when he reaches the fixture he will be a little staggered by the number of people assembled, for if there was a crowd on Monday, it is a multitude gathered together on Tuesday. The train will have brought visitors from afar. Market Harborough, as well as Melton, looks to find its Tuesday's amusement with the Cottesmore; men travel up from Rugby; and those who live at Oakham, and are thus in the centre of hunting fashion, are of course there to a man. Beside the first qualms caused by the vast assembly of men and women, most of whom mean to ride, and all to see as much of the sport as circumstances and their own nerve will allow, the newcomer may well have his keen expectations somewhat shadowed by a feeling of dismay when he sees the country.

Tilton Wood is the first fixture of the season by the Cottesmore for their Melton country. As we ride up to the meeting place beneath Robin-a-Tiptoes, and stand at the gate which looks down over the field below, the crowd of horsemen, the dark masses of the woods and the steep sides of the hills may well daunt us. Can these be the fair green pastures, flat and smooth, which we are accustomed to think of as the Cream of the Shires? But, indeed, if we have had such thoughts of the country, it is time we should discard them. If we desire flat and level plains of grass, it is in Cheshire, and the Woore country of the North Stafford hunt, rather than in Leicestershire that we must look for them. With the exception of one or

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two isolated bits of country, there is very little level ground in Leicestershire.

However, when we have hunted for a short time, we shall appreciate the advantages of this Tilton side of the Cottesmore, and we shall recognise that, though there are bigger crowds with the Cottesmore than with any fashionable pack, except perhaps with the Pytchley on Wednesdays, yet they hinder the hounds and impede one another less than might be expected. The steep hills, the deep complicated bottoms and the big woods seem to swallow them up, while the stiff fences, met with after a gallop up hill, weed out all but the best men and the stoutest horses, for when hounds run in this division of the country they can always beat horses. If fox-hunting, indeed, were merely galloping over smooth grass in the wake of a racing pack, it would not have the charm it has, and this rougher country of the Cottesmore is attractive to hundreds.

It is in the nature of Englishmen, and perhaps especially of hunting people, to grumble, and you will hear people complaining of the difficulties of riding to hounds over or through the stretch of woodland country that lies between the Tugby and Skeffington districts, or Owston Wood, or round Launde Abbey, but they will come all the same because they are sportsmen and sportswomen, and because they love the variety of hunting, and know that, if it were not for its disappointments, we might as well ride after a red herring. The pleasure of seeing a fox well found and steadily hunted, of seeing hounds as they draw nearer their fox running harder, and then at last, as the scent fails with a tiring fox, come to hunting again till they run into him at last, is in itself the most perfect of sports. Thus, although, when they have

been left behind, disappointed men and women will grumble sometimes at the intricacies of Loddington, the steeps of Tilton and Skeffington, or the depths of Launde, yet they will never fail to come there.

Owston wood is different, for, though it is a long covert, it is not very deep nor is the undergrowth very thick. It is perfectly preserved and adequately hunted. This, indeed, is the secret of success in any woodland district. Constant hunting and woods preserved and kept quiet between the hunting days will always produce stout foxes. If, as is the case in some countries, shooting interests prevail, and hounds are kept out of the coverts, there never can be first-rate sport. One of the reasons why the Cottesmore show such sport in their Tuesday country, is because they have a Master and huntsman who know that no brilliancy in the open can result in good sport without it rests on a foundation of hard work in the woods. Thatcher works his woods and kills plenty of cubs in the autumn, and the members of the hunt reap the reward in the winter.

To hunt with a pack of hounds, such as are the Cottesmore, in a wooded district like the Tilton and Owston portions of the hunt, where thick, deep and often sticky coverts are surrounded by old turf carrying a good scent, is in itself a training in hunting craft. No one who does not pay close attention to hounds, or who cannot understand what is going on to a certain extent, will see much of the fun, unless fortune is very kind to him or he has a pilot better instructed than himself. But Melton goes to Tilton because after all most of the visitors to the former place love hunting as well as riding, hounds almost as much as horses. The Melton people are drawn from the class who have hunted for generations, and from those who with in-

creasing wealth are gradually growing up into the habits and ways of thought of that class. The mere hard rider is the exception, nor as a rule does he last long at hunting. When, after a short career of reckless riding punctuated by falls, he gives up hunting, he generally does so altogether, seeking distinction instead at the mouth of the golf hole or the hoop of the croquet lawn.

Yet I may be permitted to warn the newcomer when he first visits Tilton Wood, probably about the first Tuesday in November, not to be led away by the size of the wood into thinking he has plenty of time. It is wise politely but steadily to work to the head of the line and be as near the hounds as is right. They are a pack of flying bitches noted for their necks and shoulders, and they can race up and down hill faster than the best of us can follow. The huntsman is quick and his hounds trust him and fly to him. There will be a single challenge from a hound, a note on the horn, and the pack will be flying through the covert much faster than you can travel along the sticky rides. Like a flash they will be over into Skeffington Wood, and when you reach the gate above the stream and turn sharp to the right after the man in front—it is just as likely to be a woman—gallop as you will, the hounds will very likely be half-way to the Coplow before you are over the fence or through the bridle gate. Mostly stake and bound fences and the usual ditches, some rails and the undulating ridge and furrow, with a convenient grass-bordered road as an alternative, lie between you and the Coplow. But—and here you will find the difference between grass countries and others—hounds once on the grass, when there is anything of a scent, scarcely hover at all, but pack together quickly and race away. Or it may be that three or

four couple race off with the lead without pausing at all, while the rest strain after them through the crowd of horses, managing to reach their comrades somehow.

Thus, in spite of all the disadvantages of strong woodlands and deep rides, it is well to make up your mind to be present as often as you can and to take one of your best horses whenever Tilton or Loddington is on the card, and, whatever else you do, you will never miss Owston unless you are laid up altogether. No one goes to Owston to see sights. It is far from a town and not very favourably situated for the railroad. Those who go to Owston go to hunt or to ride, most probably for love of both. There is some rough going round Withcote, a ploughed field or two, and some bottoms only to be crossed by bridges. There are also some beautiful rolling grass fields towards Knossington, on the other side of the wood.

Perhaps most people know the line best as it appears when they ride from Knossington to Owston. Naturally it is the commoner line from the plantations, which Mr. Duncan preserves so carefully for foxes near Knossington Grange, to the woods of Owston and Launde. The fences hereabouts are stiff but jumpable by the ordinary (Leicestershire) man on an average (Leicestershire) horse. They do not require the combination of youth and audacity, or a horse out of the common, that the Skeffington Oxer or the fences round Waterloo Gorse demand. Mr. Sawyer on Hotspur could ride over the first, but it would take young Rapid and the King of the Golden Mines to cross the other, and even he might take a fall. There are some stiff posts and rails, and those who have seen Mr. "Timber" Powell crossing this line of country in the past, will have noted his performance with great but possibly distant admiration.

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Owston Wood is in the middle of some delightful country. Two miles of grass and flying fences, not neatly cut and laid, but for the most part in a natural condition, rough but therefore not impassable, separate Owston and Lady Wood. It is a stiff four miles in the other direction to Tilton, and there is a rough but likely line over the meadows of Marefield and their rail-mended fences to John o' Gaunt. The man with a hunter that knows his business and that can jump rails at a pinch can cross most of this country if he will trust himself to the guidance of the pack. Probably too he who rides to hunt, but has not unlimited blood horses up to fourteen stone at three hundred guineas apiece, will see as much sport from Owston Wood and its suburb, The Little Wood, as from any coverts in the Shires.

Some readers may think it rather slow to dwell on these big coverts when there are others more famous and surrounded by perfect country much nearer to Melton. But there is a precedent for the preference. "Lord Lonsdale and all the gentlemen like the Owston country best of any . . . its quite Leicestershire fencing, very little plough, good scenting, quite open country, and every kind of fence." There are, too, fixtures which mean the same kind of country, such as Launde Abbey and its woods, where Major Dawson is a careful preserver of foxes. These woods have of late seasons been the point of some of Mr. Fernie's best runs. The Abbey is itself a notable feature, a fine Elizabethan house buried in the woods with remnants of the older Abbey built into it. It is now twenty years or more ago since the tenants of the Abbey were summoned from the breakfast table by the sound of the horn, and ran out just in time to see hounds breaking up a fox on the lawn under the windows.

“What hounds are they?” “Mr. Tailby’s”; and they had come ten miles in a straight line in the cub-hunting season from Glen Oaks.

Every Tuesday, then, and every alternate Saturday the Melton man has the Cottesmore within reach. Of these fixtures Stapleford Park is one of the nearest, about four miles away, and Leesthorpe, perhaps the most famous of all, though if the latter has the Punch-bowl and Ranksborough, the former will possibly offer you a chance of distinction at the Whissendine. There are, in fact, two brooks, each of which claims to be the true Whissendine, but, whichever you fall into, the results are much the same. The streams vary in width in different places, and no doubt it was one of these narrower spots Lord Gardner was racing at, when he made his historic boast, “A fig for the Whissendine.” At all events you may meet the brooks so called on a Tuesday or alternate Saturday, quite as often as you like.

Ranksborough is of course the most famous of Cottesmore coverts. It has been sung by Mr. Bromley Davenport in the best song of the saddle ever written, “The Dream of the Old Meltonian.” Every writer on hunting has spoken its praises. Ranksborough is a straggling covert on the slope of a low hill, and, look which way you will from its outskirts, you see a hunting country that cannot be surpassed. The source of Ranksborough’s fame is first the care originally taken of it by the Noel family, themselves the founders of the Cottesmore hunt, and next the beautiful hunting country round it. It was when speaking of Mr. Osbaldeston’s run from the Coplow that Nimrod remarked—and he was riding to Ranksborough at the time—“I really think that if an artist were to paint a panorama and make fox-hunting the subject of it, his

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imagination could not furnish him with a finer subject for his pencil." Nothing could be more true. From Ranksborough you look over the choicest of the wide pastures, the flying fences and the variety of ground that make Leicestershire what it is. But indeed all this Tuesday country will be found delightful with this one caution to the newcomer : " You cannot ride over it on a bad horse, a weak horse, or a faint-hearted one, nor can you cross it on the best animal that ever was foaled unless he is in condition."

Many are the charming and fox-haunted coverts of the district. Orton Park Wood, just three miles from Ranksborough, a square wood of thirty-five or forty acres, a refuge for foxes, a landmark to riders, and an almost certain find. Or there is Prior's Coppice, the Fishponds at Cold Overton, the plantations at Knossington, or the Punchbowl at Leesthorpe. Wherever you go, the country is good, and perhaps there is no better scenting grass in Leicestershire than the Tuesday country of the Cottesmore. Nor must we forget the pleasant stretches of the more level lower country, such as the Burton flats or the fields near Pickwell.

When on Wednesday comes the first time we hunt with the Belvoir hounds, it is an occasion not to be forgotten. Every covert, every field is historic in hunting annals, and it is probable that the prospect of following in the footsteps of the famous riders of the past will inspire us. Such were the gallant Lord Forester, who had at last to be lifted on to his horse, but could always take a good place, no matter what the country, when once in the saddle, or Will Goodall, the great huntsman who never seemed to think of fences at all but only of his hounds, or the late Duke of Rutland who once jumped Croxton Park wall six feet high and a drop beyond.

But this is wandering from the Melton man's Wednesday Hunt. He will probably have heard that this Leicestershire country of the Belvoir is one famous for short quick bursts, and this is true, speaking generally, the fact being that there are many small artificial coverts, and the foxes found there are of the character common to most foxes that live in such places. They run short, knowing but little country, and the Belvoir are unquestionably a quick pack and have been hunted by a succession of quick huntsmen. Their sharpness at starting is favoured by the smallness of coverts like Brentingby or Scalford, and such little gorses and spinnies in a well-preserved, well-hunted country often hold a fox. In the nature of things, hounds cannot be very far behind their quarry when he starts. Yet the runs on this side are not by any means always short. Small coverts fairly numerous often mean frequent changes, and thus a run goes on from one to the other, covering in all a large extent of ground. The country is rather more difficult to ride over than the Quorn. There are more ditches and bigger, though, like much of the best of the Quorn, the fences in some, though not all, of the Wednesday country can be taken anywhere, and it is no uncommon sight to see twenty or thirty men ride at them abreast. To wait for your turn is not, then, so frequently necessary as in some other neighbouring countries. The Melton side of the Belvoir, moreover, rides rather deeper in wet weather than the Quorn or even than the Cottesmore. But the general character of the country is much the same; cut and laid fences are the rule with a ditch to or from you and, more seldom, one on both sides of the hedge. As in the Quorn so in the Belvoir, "the oxers" and "bullfinches" are decreasing in numbers, and the stout rail is now replaced by a strand of wire which is often

taken down in the winter, but, alas, sometimes only has its presence marked by a warning post. From this however it must not be supposed that the Belvoir has more wire than its neighbours, for such is not the case.

The traditional opening fixture is Croxton Park, under the ruined walls of a house built as a fishing box for the fourth Duchess of Rutland. The first draw from this fixture, the day I first saw the pack, was Bescaby Oaks, a fair sized wood reached by a muddy lane, but with broad sound rides intersecting it. Aided by the music of the pack, it is not a difficult covert to start from. Sproxton Thorns is within sight, a small square covert in which nevertheless a fox can sometimes manage to hang for a time. Waltham Village is another fixture which, being but a very short distance from Croxton Park, means much the same coverts. Some time in the day hounds will draw Freeby Wood, a small covert of forty acres or so, which is noted for being the starting-point of many a good gallop. Not far away is Goadby Gorse, which, by the way, is a wood or copse of small size, perhaps of eighteen to twenty acres. Round about Waltham there is some plough, and the country is severe. Coston Covert is one of the best in the hunt. A quarter of an hour, or it may be twenty minutes away lies Woodwell Head in the Cottesmore country, a beautiful line to ride if you have a start. Round Coston the fences are not small, but you may as well ride at them in one place as another. As a rule, they are equally jumpable along the greater part of their length. Then there is of course Melton Spinney, easily noted by its trees on a hill, with the brook running below. This we might say was not difficult to jump, if so many people did not find it so.

Two of the most notable coverts, the drawing of which is looked forward to by Melton people, are Burbidge's and Sherbrooke's. The former was made by a stout old yeoman, who in the course of his life saw more sport on fewer horses than falls to the lot of most men. He kept but a small stud, and each horse lasted him for many seasons. His brother was well known to a past generation of Meltonians as the landlord of the George at Melton. It is not so very long ago that old Mr. Burbidge used to come out to see his covert drawn, and be as excited as a boy when a fox was handsomely found. The covert, a blackthorn brake only a mile from Melton, is situated in a bend of the river Wreake. Needless to say, the covert was meant to be a portal to the Quorn and Cottesmore countries, and often opens the way for a gallop over some of the best of one or other of these hunt territories. In the same way, Sherbrooke's, on the banks of the Smite, commands the Belvoir Vale, and forms a link between the Quorn and such Belvoir coverts as Piper's Hole or Harby Hills, with a nice bit of flat country towards the hills, with fences which have somewhere been not inaptly described as "stake and bound fair but fierce."

The brooks of this Wednesday country are its chief drawback to those who do not like water, or whose horses refuse it. The Smite, with its steep and rough banks, has turned many a good horse and half drowned many a bold man. The same may be said of the other streams, but the Smite is the best known and the most feared.

There are still a few coverts which I have not mentioned: Casthorpe, which, it is said, was planted by the late Duke to hide a ploughed field from the castle windows, and some of the Vale coverts; but I leave

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the Vale for Saturday, though, if you are fortunate, you will see something of it on a Wednesday too.

On Wednesday our visitor will find himself in exactly the same company as on Monday and Tuesday, for, in fact, Melton has nowhere else to go. In any case, he will have had a pleasant day, and in all probability not be far from his stable door when he has finished.

As to the best way of occupying Thursday there may be some difference of opinion, and it is quite probable that the Melton division may scatter its forces on that day. Of course, if the Quorn should have a bye-day on Thursday, that would be the easiest, but then bye-days generally take place in a country subsequently to be described as the Friday country, one of the best and pleasantest in England to ride over. But if the Quorn be not within reach, or the pack should be in the kennel, two courses are open. You may take the train, or have a long ride or drive, to hunt with Mr. Fernie, whose Thursdays are, as were those of Mr. Tailby before him, delightful, or you may go to the Cottesmore. In any case, the distance will be greater than on the other days, just so much farther from home in the latter case as may make you wish you lived at Oakham. The increasing popularity of the last-named town as a hunting centre it owes to its pleasant situation and its freedom from the manufacturing factories which threaten to spoil Melton.

The growing reputation of the Cottesmore hunt has tended to swell the gatherings in the Thursday country, which indeed has many attractions for the hunting man. The Vale of Catmore is chiefly grass, and is divided by fences easier than those of the more strictly Melton side of the country. This, however, pleases some people who like to jump as well as gallop, but who

like the former in moderation. In any case it is a change, and there is considerable difference between the Thursday district of the Cottesmore and the rest of the Melton country. There is more plough, and there are large tracts of woodland; but the woods hold foxes, and the plough carries a scent and rides fairly light in an ordinary season. Moreover, the present huntsman, Arthur Thatcher, has shown excellent sport over this part of the country, and some most enjoyable runs have occurred during the season of 1902-3. There may, nay, sometimes there must be, a day chiefly spent on the plough or in the woods, but not seldom there will be a gallop from Morkery to Woodwell Head. Cottesmore Wood, too, has been the starting-point of several excellent runs, and the Stocken Hall fixtures have proved successful. It is always worth while to go out for the sake of the possibility of a hunt over the Langham Pastures, or a gallop, such as took place while this book was being written, from Manton Gorse to Launde Wood, up the valley between Ridlington and Prior's Coppice. Burley Woods, too, are a certain find, and there is always the chance of a run into Belvoir territory. Then there is the opportunity of seeing the dog hounds, which, handled as they are by their huntsmen, is one of the most interesting sights to watch in the Shires. So it is not surprising that each season we see more people go forth to hunt from Melton with the Cottesmore on a Thursday, and this is the choice I should advise. It is perhaps more of a hunting than a riding country compared to some which I have written of or about which I have yet to write; but even this is only comparative, for no man who cannot or will not ride fairly straight and hard can hope to see the best of the sport. Yet possibly the average rider, he who is neither a thruster nor a

skirter, is likely to find as much enjoyment here as anywhere else in the Midlands.

There is no question as to where you will go on a Friday. The Quorn card will settle that. Wherever that pack is advertised will of course be your destination. The whole of the country is grass and, although it needs the best of horseflesh, it is less trying than the Belvoir, the Cottesmore or Mr. Fernie's. The rider finds it easier too. It calls for pluck and judgment, but not the desperate resolution sometimes needed elsewhere; for, without having the foolhardiness of a certain noble lord, who was said to look on every big fence as a challenge which it would be dishonour to refuse, there are times in some countries when a man must jump a larger fence than he cares for, or resign his place in front and perhaps lose the run altogether. If we except certain places a man may as well ride at one fence as another, and so long as his horse is not blown and is a safe timber-jumper, he can follow the line of the hounds. Not that I mean to suggest that it is child's play to ride to the Quorn, but simply that the tax on the rider's courage and the strength of his horse is less severe. The hills and the ridge and furrow are both there, but are perhaps neither so trying nor so wearing as elsewhere.

At first sight, the country seems to be one of sound grass and big flying fences, but on closer acquaintance we find that there are drawbacks. The foxes are plentiful indeed but not very enterprising. They may not know a very wide extent of country, but what they do they know thoroughly, so that not a drain or a rabbit hole but receives a hunted fox, not, as would be right if they played the game, as a last resort to save them, but before they have been a decent length of time before hounds. Then there is the crowd, which

for many reasons is very great. Mr. Fernie does not always hunt on that day, and, if he does, is on the side of his country least favoured by his more ambitious followers. The Cottesmore people who live along the border come across as a matter of course, and that is one of the attractions of a house at Somerby, while Leicester also is within reach. Once on a time Leicester was a hunting centre. It is so no longer, and if it turns out some excellent sportsmen it also sends out a motley throng, carriages, char-à-banc (locally cherry-bang), carts, bicycles, and an occasional motor. Not less than five or six hundred people will turn out, and, although it may be said that when hounds really run the crowd is scattered and the best men come here as elsewhere by their own places, yet the fox is a timid animal, and the fox-hound an excitable one, so that many a run is nipped in the bud.

There was something to be said for the plan of the sportsman who galloped across country to the meet—that was in old days and would not be allowed now—but never really rode till the afternoon had thinned off the crowd. Putting aside the fact that scent on bright days is often better in the evening, particularly on the grass, the hounds and fox, not to speak of the huntsman, have a better chance in the afternoon than in the morning. And yet, allowing for all disadvantages, the people who come out with the Quorn on a Friday are in the right of it. Is there in the length and breadth of the Shires a country more perfectly adapted to the sport? Does not the brilliancy of the too brief gallop over that springy turf, when the good horse gives one the sensation of flight as he strides over his fences, make up for many disappointments?

But let us turn to consider the country more in detail. The river Wreake is its northern and western

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boundary ; the Leicester and Uppingham road is the southern. The river and the rail are real limits, and foxes do but seldom cross them ; but on the east the way is open into the Cottesmore country, and the Quorn and the Cottesmore harry the foxes backwards and forwards, between the Friday country of one and the Tuesday country of the other, with considerable frequency. Curiously enough, though I cannot exactly say why, the excursions to or from Mr. Fernie's country are less frequent and shorter when they occur.

The visitor's first Friday at Melton will recall the vivid description given by Nimrod of the bustle of preparation. First, the horses starting for the meet—and there will be many more of these than in Nimrod's time with side-saddles. The neat grooms are riding one and leading another, and jogging steadily on to the meeting-place, which we will suppose to be Scrap-toft. An hour or so later the masters and mistresses of the horses will begin to follow, some of the former on smart polo ponies ; and the ride to covert is not one of the least delightful features of the day's performance. The roads in Leicestershire run for the most part through the fields, and the stranger will do well to have a guide, for the geography of the place is not easily learned. Sign-posts it is true there are, but, having embarked on a bridle road, it is no easy matter to take the most direct course, as Mr. Sawyer in fiction and Mr. Vickerman in fact, found to their cost. The latter, for twenty years secretary to the Essex stag-hounds, paid a visit to Melton in 1846, and, riding to covert, got "completely bewildered in the great grass grounds of High Leicestershire, rising in undulating swells in all directions around me with few trees and sprinkled over with cattle and sheep, but not a living soul within ken." Then he met a woman, and received

from her some directions which did not much improve matters, as, like those of many guides, her instructions were of no use unless you knew the way. So the good Essex sportsman got as "completely lost as if in the desert of Sahara, and in a locality which seemed about equally populous. Here was I fuming and fretting, galloping about among the large grass lands, trying one bridle way after another with alike indifferent success."

However, Mr. Vickerman found hounds at last, but still we may remember from his experience that it is wiser not to trust to luck. When you do know the way, it is delightful cantering on the living turf in the soft grey misty light of a Leicestershire hunting morning. This is the pleasantest way of going to covert, as it gets one settled in the saddle, brings the riding muscles into play, and prepares the way for the greater efforts to come. However, some people prefer to reserve their strength by driving, not as in Nimrod's day in post-chaises, but a few luxurious ones in broughams, and the majority in pony carts, while, alas, a few are to be seen in motors.

Now I do not like to be reminded as I go hunting that I am an anachronism by the bee-in-a-bottle buzz of an automobile. I feel inclined to retort to the driver as a college don once did to an undergraduate, when the latter suggested that celibate Fellows with a lifelong tenure were anachronisms: "Possibly, but you must remember that commoners are an excrescence on the system of the University."

But, however we may choose to go, the fixture is reached at last, and as many as possible are being packed opposite the quaint old grey hall of Scraftoft, where Hartopps have reigned as long as most of us can remember. Well do I recollect the procession of

well-mounted, well-equipped servants that used to delight the folk from Leicester in Lord Lonsdale's reign, which struck me, fresh from the provinces, all the more from its novelty. Scraftoft Gorse is just on the borders of the Quorn country, and is reached by a lane which on this occasion was packed as far as eye could reach. Of course there was a fox, for Captain Burns-Hartopp looked after the covert, and equally of course hounds got away, for Lord Lonsdale kept order and Tom Firr hunted hounds. I may be wrong, but it has always seemed to me that between Scraftoft and Keyham is a country as stiff as any in the Quorn. I seem to recollect chasms which only revealed themselves in their full terrors of ragged water-worn banks when one was already in the air, having jumped apparently at a simple fence. The horse will, however, probably get over if you only sit still and leave his head alone.

From Scraftoft there is good galloping ground should the fox turn to the Coplow, that blue rounded hill which will tell you where you are going, and if you know any easy places, gaps, gates, or even lanes—and such there are—now is the time to make for them, unless you are able and willing to ride the line of hounds. The stake and bound fences are not high, but they are very firm. The skill of a Leicestershire hedger is not to be surpassed, and now that prizes are given for well-laid fences we may expect them to be more uncompromising than ever. If the Coplow is the point, it is more than likely that you may find yourself in the square wood by the roadside known as Botany Bay. Very likely the fox will turn and go back to Scraftoft, running over the road and skirting the Coplow coverts, crossing the picturesque field below the house and leading you over a hairy fence of thorn. Or, again,

there may be a fresh fox, and he may then run up over the railroad and past Quenby Hall, a fine old house which will catch your eye even in the excitement of the chase, and be marked down in your memory half unconsciously as a useful landmark.

On another day you may find yourself at Gaddesby, and the Hall will seem strangely familiar until you recollect that you have seen the prints of it, from Mr. G. D. Giles's clever pictures, in some printseller's window. The country round is grass, the fences are strong but fair, and the gates swing easily on their hinges if the fences are, as they may be, too big for your early morning resolution. Many men, as we know, go well in the evening, who cannot, or perhaps I should say will not, do much in the morning.

You may see hounds draw Barkby Holt, or ride the two miles, a very frequent and never stale ten minutes or so, to Baggrave. Possibly Scraftoft is once more the fox's point, and then, if you are quick, there are a good many fair rails in the otherwise stiff fences. Other people, however, besides yourself like to see what is the other side and will make for the rails, and you may have the agonising experience of waiting your turn while the musical ripple of hound music dies away in the distance. What perils we go through in order to lose a run, when it is really much safer as well as pleasanter to ride straight ! A post and rails in a corner, albeit not big, are no safer when twenty or thirty horses have poached up the take off, than a larger fence jumped from sound and springy turf ; but some people never can get rid of their dislike of the harsh outline of a well-grown blackthorn. Perhaps this is the reason why huntsmen are so bold. They have their hounds to look to, and, having once made up their minds that the fence is to be crossed, never look

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at it. Mr. Assheton Smith did not; I never could see that Tom Firr did; and Arthur Thatcher just takes any fence as it comes.

There is another famous covert in this part of the hunt, the Prince of Wales' Gorse. It may be a second or later draw from some other fixture, or we may begin the day with it from Baggrave Hall, where not so very long ago General Burnaby was wont to receive the hunt with hospitality. Prince of Wales' Gorse was planted by the present King in 1871, and it has held foxes ever since it reached maturity. I saw it drawn three times, if not more, on one afternoon in Lord Lonsdale's mastership, and each time Firr came away with a fox. It is a stirring sight to see a big Quorn field start from the top side of the covert when a fox goes away to South Croxton. The chances here are everywhere in favour of a short gallop and a merry one, but there may be a longer run, as some five-and-twenty years ago, from the gorse near Barkby to Tilton, an almost ideal line for a fox-chase.

Farther away towards the Cottesmore borderland is Lowesby Hall, in the dining-room of which Lord Waterford performed the famous feat of riding his horse over the table. Then there is John o' Gaunt, not now perhaps quite what it was before it gave its name to a railway junction. It is not the easiest of coverts to start from. The hunt is generally gathered in a field with the covert in front and to the right an impassable fence filled by a narrow bridle gate, which soon becomes jammed with the pushing crowd. There is a way round to the left, but it takes time which can ill be spared if hounds run, yet there is generally a chance, for, when I have been there, the pack has seldom been able to start quite at once. There is a line from here to Owston Wood or Tilton which is quite practicable

and over a wild hunting-like country. To the north of this lie Ashby Pastures, a square wood of perhaps a hundred acres or so, and Thorpe Trussels ; neither of these are very good scenting coverts, and hounds are apt to slip away from them quietly. Indeed, everywhere in Leicestershire it is advisable to be alert, because the undergrowth of thorns and grass in the coverts is thick and hounds cannot say much about the find.

Nor have I told of the Twyford Vale, which is one of the famous riding grounds of the Shires. It was my lot once to share in a run which took us over this vale and right away to Scraptoft, and we lost a beaten fox at Keyham, Lord Lonsdale finishing on the horse of the whipper-in. Such a ride lives in one's memory, nor have I forgotten seeing the ease and grace with which the late Tom Firr sailed over the vale, never far from his hounds. The sport shown by that great huntsman on Fridays was wonderful when we consider the number of his field. For one thing he never lost his head and, keen as he was—for we felt he enjoyed the sport as much as any of us—he never was too excited to do the right thing. I have seen him lift his hounds clear of a crowd in the morning, and in the afternoon have watched him patiently hunting his fox to death with a failing scent and letting the pack alone to work. The crowd had gone home, and but a small band of followers watched the hunting of the fox with as much enjoyment as they had shown in the quick gallop of the morning.

This Friday country of the Quorn is full of variety of fences, and a horse must gallop and turn, fly and creep as occasion offers, if his rider is to see the best of the sport. I have not seldom found that people have been disappointed on first coming to Leicestershire, for

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they have pictured it as a vast plain of grass intersected with flying fences. Instead of that, it is, as my readers will before now have learned, an undulating, rather hilly country and the fences of very varied descriptions. Sometimes you can fly these, and again at others you can barely creep through. Often only courage in the man, boldness in the horse, and the constraining effect of pace in the hounds will enable a rider to cross them at all. There are fences which even a good man to hounds would hardly ride at if he had time to think. Horses can do more perhaps than we give them credit for, yet it is certainly only the pace that carries us over some parts of the country. A horse must be a hunter, and a man must be something of a horseman, able at least to sit still and leave his horse's head alone. Moreover, he must like jumping, or he will find himself out of place here. "I think, sir," once said a well-known hunt servant to a man who was alongside, as a stranger turned aside from a big fence, "that gentleman has no business in *our* shire."

Although, however, the man who would see a hunt must like jumping, he must not jump when he can fairly avoid it, for it has been well said that to be ridden over a big fence with fourteen stone on his back takes as much out of a horse as to gallop half-way over a forty-acre field. The best men do not waste their horses' strength, knowing that, though great, it is not unlimited. Therefore the men without judgment seldom see the end of a fast run. Thus if you watch the best men, you will see that they start quickly and gallop hard till they are on terms with hounds, and they turn from no possible fences, but they are always ready to trot off to a gate or take advantage of a gap if by so doing they do not lose their places. It may be safely asserted that in

few runs that last over ten or fifteen minutes do hounds go equally fast all the time. Directly you can command their pace then is the time to save the horse. It may be only a burst, but if it should last for forty minutes at a fair pace, even though you have the best blood in England under the saddle, yet you will want all your horse's courage and strength to see the end.

To the man who really can and will ride to hounds a knowledge of the country is a positive snare. He may be a judge of pace, indeed, and must have an eye for a country, but he should see the hounds only and direct his course by them. To ride cunning, to ride to points, is fatal in grass countries. There is not time, so quickly do hounds rush forward even with a comparatively moderate scent. Then scent improves sometimes very suddenly, and hounds are away in a moment. True, if you are thrown out, as everybody must be sometimes, to know the country is an advantage, but it is not worth while to know it too well, for, after all, a pilot can generally be found. In this, however, I am speaking only to the hard-riding man. I have often occasion to seek for information from people about runs, and I find that the straightest and best riders are often the worst historians. Even among hunting correspondents some of the most accurate narrators of the course of a run are those who do not ride, but go afoot or on a bicycle. The fact is that the man who rides a fox-chase is like a man in a battle in that he only sees a small part of the fray.

But this has led me away from the Quorn Friday country, which on the whole is one of the best districts in England. That the sport is good the very crowds show. Fashion indeed may bring some, but

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there is no field in England where there are so many men and women who mean to ride to hounds as will be seen in the lane by Cream Gorse, in the road near Ashby Pastures, in the village street of Twyford or Thorpe Satchville, or any other well-known spot within its borders from November to March.

Saturday is a day which perhaps is looked forward to as keenly as any. If the five preceding days have left us a little jaded, the very names of the Saturday meets are enough to stir us up to renewed zest for hunting. There is sometimes a choice, but one Saturday will generally find us in the Melton country of the Cottesmore and the next in the Belvoir Vale, or, tempted by the country round Wardley Wood and the prospect of a gallop round Belton or Ridlington, we may ride the fifteen miles to Beaumont Chase or Stoke Dry. In any case there will be sport if there is scent. On the character of the country I need not dwell, for it is on the whole similar to the rest of the country of the Belvoir or the Cottesmore, which is within reach of the town of Melton. The Belvoir Vale is sometimes deep, and this gives its fences, which are severely neat with a stern primness about the strong, well-laid binders and the clean-cut ditches, a greater terror. Even good men have failed to face the Vale.

The Cottesmore, on the other hand, will offer you a more unkempt country, but to my mind a certain wildness and roughness adds to the pleasure of hunting. Fox-hunting is essentially a sport which appeals to the underlying poetic side of our nature, and I cannot imagine a true sportsman being unmoved by its picturesque aspect. If this were not so, why not pursue the carted deer or the red herring? Whyte-Melville has said that there is much of the poet in the

sportsman, and he was himself the best example of the truth of his own words. I think but few men continue to hunt after the first flush and fire of youth is over unless they enjoy this side of hunting. So this, perchance, is one reason why women, who are more prosaic than men, seldom become veterans in the sport.

But that there is another side to this view of the Melton country is not to be disguised. Mr. Vicker-man shall once more give us his views, as they may be found in Mr. Yerburch's delightful "Leaves from a Hunting Diary." This hard rider says: "There is many a spot in the neighbourhood where I should like to pitch my tent. The country looks so English, the very hills, though detrimental to hunting"—this I rather doubt, for if it were not for the hills it would be very difficult for hounds ever to draw away from such riders and horses as are found in Leicestershire—"give it a variety of scent, and the continued grass and bridleways render it delightful for riding or rambling over. I can scarcely imagine a more enjoyable life than to have one's headquarters in this neighbourhood. . . . But after all this eulogium, shall I say I am disappointed with Leicestershire as a hunting country, or rather that it does not come up to my expectations or the opinions I had formed of it from the hasty view and taste of it I had in the latter part of the season of 1844? It is more hilly than I expected, and the fences, though few and far between,"—they are more numerous now—"are in too many places impracticable, so that it is impossible to ride as straight as over the Roothings, and offers a premium to those who affect gateways and bridleways, which are found in abundance. At any rate, I think that I am not premature in saying that I am disappointed

with the greater part of the country round Melton, so much so as to feel some surprise that it should ever have attained such fame and popularity. But it must have proceeded rather from its central position in regard to the three packs of the Quorn, Belvoir and Cottesmore than to the goodness of the country, for all its best country lies in High Leicestershire, which is a greater distance from Melton than from either Leicester, Lutterworth or Market Harborough.”*

Like Brooksby and many other writers, Mr. Vickerman then goes on to speak of “Billesdon, which is very central for the best country of the Quorn and Cottesmore.” Billesdon, from which place comes the second title of Mr. Fernie’s hounds, is indeed very central and wants but better railway accommodation, and possibly the social charms of Melton, to make it as popular as any of the villages round that town, such as Asfordby, Thorpe Satchville or Somerby. There is undoubtedly much truth in what Mr. Vickerman says, yet one is a little surprised to find that he objects to the greater impracticability of the fences of the Melton district as compared to those round Market Harborough, for such is certainly not the case to-day.

As we jog back in the gathering dusk after a week spent in such surroundings as I have described, we shall feel, in spite of all drawbacks, that a well spent and happy time has been passed. We shall not regret the hours or the money spent in hunting, for the chase leaves no bitter taste in the mouth. “If I had my time to commence again, I would flirt less and hunt more,” is the saying tradition has assigned to a sportsman of old; and who shall say he was wrong? The only drawback to our perfect enjoy-

* “Leaves from a Hunting Diary in Essex,” p. 342.

ment of hunting is that it makes the time pass so quickly, that if it were not for the pause of Sunday we should scarcely know we were at Melton ere it is time to throw up the hunters and return to town.

In the foregoing chapter I am conscious that I have but touched on the surface of my subject, but no one can say everything on any matter; and at least, as the reader comes to the end, he will know that Melton has become the most fashionable resort, because it is on the whole the best hunting centre in England.

CHAPTER III

A WEEK AT MARKET HARBOROUGH

Mr. Sawyer's opinion of Market Harborough—Nim South on the subject—Convenience of the Town—Difference between it and Melton—Prices of Houses—Surrounding Villages—Hotels—Easily Reached from Town—Railway lines that serve—Influence of Canals and Railways—Market Harborough compared with Melton—Reputation for Wire—Monday with Mr. Fernie—Lubenham and other Fixtures—Features of the Monday Country—The Monday alternatives : the Woodland Pytchley or the Pytchley—Tuesday with the Cottesmore—Or with Mr. Fernie—Or a Tuesday off—Wednesday with the Pytchley—The Country—Lilbourne Gorse—Stanford Park—The Hemplow—Mr. Tailby's Thursdays—Some great Runs—Nimrod on the Sport—The Sheephorns—Friday with Mr. Fernie—Mr. Greene—Alternate Fridays with the Pytchley—The Fences—The Cottesmore on Saturdays—Future of Market Harborough—Its Polo Club.

“THE very place. I wonder I never thought of it before. Strike me ugly if I won't go to Market Harborough.” There is no doubt that when Whyte-Melville's immortal hero, Mr. Sawyer, uttered these words he spoke wisely. He had not arrived at the resolution without due consideration of the best place for a country squire of moderate means to enjoy fox-hunting in the Shires. He had considered and dismissed Leamington, since its social advantages did not appeal to a bachelor who loved hunting and made no great figure in a ball-room. Then the author goes on to say that Mr. Sawyer was unwilling to face the crowds of a Pytchley Wednesday, though he



From a photograph by R. B. Lodge, Enfield

MARKET HARBOURGH

PLATE IV

altered his views about this later on, and he had no taste for the water-jumping which he understood to be necessary in Warwickshire.

Still, there was Melton, but "I am not such a fool as I look," quoth Mr. Sawyer, "and I don't mean to keep eight hunters and a couple of hacks to meet a set of fellows every day who don't condescend to notice me unless I do as they do." Melton society was indeed most exclusive in those, as in earlier, days, for we recollect how Nimrod dwells on the habit of "quizzing a slow top," which was, according to him, one of the favourite sports of Lords Alvanley and Forester, and the pleasant playful way of speaking of unknown men as "Snobs," much as the Greeks in the past, and the French people of to-day, love to speak and think of all other nations as "barbarians." "Whist," goes on Mr. Sawyer—he would speak of Bridge to-day—"and dry Champagne and off to London at the first appearance of frost, ride like a butcher all day risking thrice as much neck as I do here, and then come out 'quite the lady' at dinner time. . . . Besides I'd never sell my horses there. They order their hunters down from London just as they do their baccy and their breeches." Then it was that Market Harborough came into his mind, and he took the momentous resolution already quoted.

Another author, Nim South, who made a hunting tour in imitation of Nimrod, written with a faint flavour of the great writer's peculiar style, gives his ideas of Market Harborough. "It stands," he tells us, "on the confines of Leicestershire and Northamptonshire about eighty-three miles from London on the mail road, and contains a good wide street with a few barbers' poles sticking out, a Town Hall and a large Church." This is a true, but very in-

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sufficient, description of Market Harborough to-day. It is a pleasantly situated place and a perfect picture of a homelike English market-town. It has a population of above 6000, and is the centre of one of the best grazing districts in England. It has an excellent system of drainage and a good water-supply, and, although the town itself lies comparatively low, most of the hunting-boxes stand in a high situation, and the general healthiness of the place is above suspicion. A very considerable number of hunting people have made the neighbourhood their permanent home. No place that I know has so many pleasant houses of convenient, yet moderate, size in its immediate neighbourhood, while there is a continual demand for land suitable for building hunting-boxes.

Market Harborough is not only a pleasant town; it is a convenient one as well. It has good shops and excellent postal arrangements, not to speak of a first-rate railway service to town, of which I shall speak more at length presently. It is unquestionably—as I shall remind my readers again—a duty to buy what we can in the neighbourhood where we hunt, and nowhere can this be done more easily than at Market Harborough. The business people are well up to the requirements of hunting folk, and you can find everything you want in reason in the town or its neighbourhood from a high-priced hunter to a bootlace, and in the High Street you can have your hair cut and talk of sport to Mr. West while he does it. The fact is the business men of Harborough are themselves sportsmen and they thus learn by practice and observation what their customers require. I must not mention names, but for saddles, forage and sound liquors there are few places that beat Market Harborough to-day. Thus the same visitors come

year after year ; statesmen, soldiers and bankers of distinction, men who work hard and play hard, and find quiet and comfort in the town and the most delightful of playgrounds round it.

Possibly we might distinguish Harborough from Melton by saying that the visitors are older and for the most part men who have chosen their line of life. Hunting there is the business of the few, but the recreation of the many. There would thus be fewer six-days-a-week men at Harborough than at Melton, for even in his holidays the busy man can hardly find the strength to hunt six days a week. To do so is, no doubt, to put a great strain on the physical and muscular powers, greater as some of us have found by experience than the ordinary worker can manage.

We may now consider the conveniences of Market Harborough as a hunting centre, especially for busy men and those who have ties which call them to London from time to time. There are several ways by which the man who intends to hunt from Market Harborough can find accommodation. The first is to buy or rent a house of suitable size. As to the prices for such, the following are those actually paid. A house and a little land has sold for £3000, and I am told that a larger one is priced at £5000. A comfortable house, but without stabling, was sold a little while ago for £1800. The rent of unfurnished hunting-boxes runs from £100 to £250 for large houses, ranging down to £60 or £70 for smaller ones, while a furnished house for the season may be had for £150 to £300, or from about 5 to 10 guineas a week for shorter periods. In all these cases the houses are comfortable of their kind, and the stabling is generally of a very excellent character.

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These prices and descriptions mark the houses in the pleasant villages round Market Harborough, at Great Bowden, which is in fact a suburb, at Lubenham, hardly much more than a mile away, at Foxton, one of the most pleasant of country villages, some four miles out, at Farndon, Oxendon and Clipston, all three in a famous district of the Pytchley, at Medbourne, where the kennels of Mr. Fernie's hounds are situated, or at the Langtons, all of which are splendidly situated for hunting. The same may be said of Burton Overy, Great Glen and Carlton Curlieu, and many more. I mention these villages, because most of them have hunting-boxes, large and small, and because many people have a rooted objection to living in or even very near a town. The more permanent our settlement, the more attractive are the rural districts.

But if the intending visitor does not care to take a house, or if his visits are only occasional, then there are hotels which have a long tradition of hunting customers, and where the hunting man's wants are well understood. The "Angel" is a comfortable old-fashioned house which has been lately done up and yet not spoilt. We do not, indeed, want a second-rate imitation of a London caravanserai in a country town, but an inn where we can take our ease in the old way, and where there is plain food of the best and no chilly, sodden imitations of second-class French cookery. All the inns of Harborough are of the old coaching sort, and the "Angel" and the "Three Swans," which latter by the way has a most artistic sign, both have good stabling. So have the "Peacock" and the "Hind," and seldom do any of these fail of occupants.

There was, indeed, a time in the days of Mr. Sawyer

aforesaid, and when Mr. Tailby's fame filled every corner of the Harborough district, when more men lived at hotels for the hunting season than do so now. Yet nowadays there are some country inns where at less cost than at Harborough a man may live for a month or two, and these might well suit the convenience and pockets of soldiers on leave. Such are the "Rose and Crown" at Kibworth, where, with a friend from the Colonies, I once spent a very happy five weeks, the "Black Horse" at Billesdon and the "Black Horse" at Foxton, where a soldier friend of my own lived pleasantly for a short time a year or two back. Everywhere the stabling is good, and there are doubtless many other inns as suitable as those I have mentioned.

But to return to Market Harborough. I have already written of its convenience for men who have other occupations, and in this matter I speak from some personal experience that for busy men there is less wear and tear in living where you hunt and going up to town as the occasion arises. If Market Harborough, then, be the centre chosen, it is possible to leave town on Friday evening, to hunt with Mr. Fernie's or the Pytchley on Saturday and with Mr. Fernie on the Monday, and return to town on Monday evening. Then you can come down again after business on Wednesday and hunt on Thursday, once more with Mr. Fernie in his best country, and, going up to town again that night, have a whole day for work on Friday. Even if only two days, Friday and Saturday or Saturday and Monday, are possible, it is worth the extra length of journey to hunt on the grass. I have hunted from town and thus may claim to know, for I have tried several hunts, the Surrey Union, the Essex, the Duke of Beaufort's and the

Vale of Aylesbury, and I do not hesitate to say that, owing to the convenience of the trains and their swiftness and punctuality, Market Harborough is a better hunting centre than many places nearer town. The Midland Railway offers every facility, and the same is true of the North-Western. We can thus afford to smile at some of the prophets of evil.

“It’s all over with hunting, my Lord,” said an old Pytchley huntsman to the grandfather of the present Lord Spencer. “Why?” “Oh, these canals they are cutting must ruin it. There will be no getting across them after hounds.” This is exactly what, a few years later, every one felt about railways, and these have indeed scored the Midland pastures with many tracks, and undoubtedly they have saved the life of many a fox. Even now I cannot see “John o’ Gaunt” as the name of a railway junction without a shock! But railways, though often a trial to huntsmen and occasionally a danger to hounds, have been far less of a hindrance to hunting than might have been expected. In one sense, indeed, they have been a blessing in disguise, for had there been no railways there would have been more canals, and the latter are a very serious impediment to the sport. As the railways have killed the canals, they have indirectly benefited hunting. The railways, too, place hunting within the reach of those who could not possibly have enjoyed it in the past. There is of course another view of this, considering the crowded state of the fashionable fixtures. But we are not at this moment concerned with that.

As far as Market Harborough is concerned, no town has felt the benefit of railway extension more. The joint station of the Midland and North-Western railways is near enough for convenience and yet far

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enough away from the centre of the town not to be either a nuisance or an eyesore. Let us suppose that you desire to combine business with pleasure and we will see how it can be done. After a day on the Stock Exchange, let us say, you catch the 5.40 P.M. from St. Pancras and reach Harborough at 7.35. Or, if you prefer it, you can dine at your club and come down by the 8.30, or again you can leave Euston at 7 and dine in the train and be in Harborough before 10 P.M. Thus the traveller can go to bed in good time, a very necessary thing for a hunting man to do, for he who keeps early hours keeps his nerve. The London & North-Western gives a rather longer journey owing to the change at Northampton. If, however, you travel by daylight you will not so much grudge the extra time for the sake of the very sporting country the line runs through. The very names of the stations, Clipston, Oxendon and Lamport, are full of hunting associations.

Nor are these all the advantages of Market Harborough, for the branch lines are well contrived and the trains so arranged as to make convenient covert hacks. For instance, the line which runs through Welford and Lutterworth to Rugby commands all the famous Pytchley Wednesday country, and here again the names on the station boards are suggestive of hunting. Welford, North Kilworth, Yelvertoft, Crick and Lilbourne tell of past gallops, and, if you are going a-hunting, promise sport to come. Not less attractive is the line on to Tilton, where the station is full of horse-boxes from Melton and Market Harborough on a Tuesday, when men from both places are bent on hunting with the Cottesmore in their Tuesday country, of which much has been written above. On these lines specials are often run in the

hunting season ; the railway companies quite recognise the hunting traffic, and the officials are both courteous and intelligent. I have known a vixen and cubs to choose a platform for a playground in the early morning, and a friendly signalman has told me he used to watch them and count to see they were all there. I believe, too, that a vixen laid up a litter in Kibworth goods yard for several years. The care, too, which those good sportsmen, the engine-drivers and guards, take not to run over hounds, excites the admiration and gratitude of all who hunt in the Shires.

Having, then, established the fact that Market Harborough is comfortable to live in and is convenient to reach, let us now consider how a week's hunting may be enjoyed there. I may say at once that, while the fixtures are handy, Market Harborough is not quite so near to those which serve its sportsmen as Melton. But three or four miles can be saved in several directions by living in one of the villages, which are little more than suburbs of the centre. Thus Lubenham, or Foxton, or the Langtons—there are five of the latter I believe, Church Langton, Tur Langton, Thorpe Langton, and East and West Langton, though the last I take on trust as I have never seen it—are nearer to several meets of Mr. Fernie's and the Pytchley than Harborough itself.

The second drawback, or indeed the real hindrance, to Market Harborough as a hunting centre lies in the fact that it bears an undeserved reputation for being wired. It is well to bear in mind that this is not now so serious a hindrance to hunting as it was, so well is it removed during the hunting season. Every year more of it disappears as each first of November comes round. There is a story told which illustrates the popular if erroneous belief on this subject. A

certain well-known house standing on a hill flies a red flag when the owner is at home. "What is that flag for?" asked a stranger, as he was trotting home after hunting. "Oh," replied his companion, "that is to show that the country is wired for ten miles round."

Now, let the newcomer take his card and lay out his week's hunting. Monday will be spent with Mr. Fernie in that delightful little bit of country which lies southward of the Harborough-Leicester turnpike. The stranger, if he cares for the past and its history, will not forget that all Mr. Fernie's country belonged at one time to the Quorn. It was, indeed, known to our forefathers as the Harborough country, and was regarded by them with admiration and awe; admiration because of the wide grass pastures, and awe on account of the stiffness of its fences. As it was then, so it is now, except that there are more fences and more coverts than when Mr. Assheton Smith dared the former, or when Mr. Osbaldeston invited his followers somewhat rashly "to ride over them now," when the hounds raced away over its pastures.

This Harborough country has been written about most often by the older writers on hunting. One reason of this is that Nimrod seems generally to have visited Leicestershire late in the season, and there is no doubt that, about Harborough especially, the country round Slawston, Shangton Holt and the Ashlands valley carries a better scent late in the year than do most other parts. When other hunting countries, as we have seen, are dried up, then High Leicestershire can still be ridden over and hounds can often race a fox to death. Mr. Fernie's Monday country on its southern border marches with the Pytchley, the Harborough and Lutterworth road being

the boundary between them, except that certain coverts round Lubenham, Marston Trussells and Hothorpe are neutral between the Pytchley and Mr. Fernie's. The Monday country of the latter hunt is much the same in character as the Pytchley in some parts, and the fences are chiefly cut-and-laid hedges with small ditches; a few ragged bottoms, some timber, and a certain number of bullfinches are the obstacles that the rider may expect. Everywhere there is grass, with a rather larger admixture of plough than is to be found in the rest of the country.

But it will be convenient to take the fixtures as the stranger will see them and to note what may be expected from each. The nearest to Market Harborough is Lubenham, a small village which lies on the main road to Lutterworth. This will lead to the neutral coverts at Marston Hills, where there are fairly large coverts, and Hothorpe Gorse, which lies at the back of Sibbertoft, and is partly gorse and partly wood. These coverts are most picturesquely situated on the ridge and sides of an abrupt line of hills which divide Leicestershire from Northamptonshire. In and about the coverts the slopes are steep, and the going is rough; but when once a fox is away, he will lead over a fine range of country, having the choice of some good Pytchley country on one side and a beautiful grass vale on the other, though the latter, alas, is spoiled by the railway and the canal. Foxes, however, will sometimes cross these, for on the opposite side of the valley is the wooded line of the Laughton Hills, grassy slopes with dark patches of woodlands giving excellent covert with a southern aspect, and much favoured by foxes. The covert known as Pamps lies at the foot of the Marston Hills.

At the pretty village of Theddingworth the road again becomes the boundary, and we reach a country more like that so often written of and praised as the Pytchley Wednesday district. The coverts are mostly true gorses, such as Mowsley New Covert and Bosworth Gorse, while beyond is Walton Holt, a thorn covert which generally holds foxes and is seldom a week without having hounds either to draw it or run to it. For about two miles away is Kilworth Sticks, a famous Pytchley covert. Generally the first thought of a fox when ousted from the one covert is to run to the other, and in so doing he leads over a charming line of grass fields and moderate fences. For all this part of the country Foxton or Theddingworth may be named, as well as Lubenham.

When Mowsley, which is only a pleasant trot from Harborough, is on the card, Gilmorton may be the first draw, and this will mean a gallop into the Atherstone country, where the fields are level and the fences to all appearance easier, for there is no need to string out and take your turn, as they can be jumped anywhere. It is curious that, though this country looks easier than some of the neighbouring districts, there is sure to be a good deal of grief when hounds cross it.

Not far from Mowsley are the famous coverts of John and Jane Ball, which, as well as Walton Holt, were planted for the Quorn hunt early in the last century by a yeoman named Oldacre, a noted maker of thorn coverts. A silver cup was presented to him by the hunt as a token of gratitude for his skill in making, and his care in preserving, these coverts. John Ball is finely situated on the slope of a rather lofty hill with a fine view which may well excite the admiration of the sportsman, for it presents a series of panoramic views of a country, every yard of which

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is fitted for the chase, and across which many historic runs have taken place. From John Ball over the road to Jane Ball, and away to Walton Holt or Willoughby Waterless are lines which will not be forgotten by those who have ridden them. Nor will any one ever weary of them. Peatling, Foxton and Countesthorpe are all names which will become familiar, and all are associated with sport. Wistow Park and its coverts lead us back to Kibworth, and thence we find ourselves at Smeeton Gorse and Gumley. The latter, though only a patch of woodland, is a noted stronghold for foxes, and Gumley Hall is the traditional opening meet of Mr. Fernie's hounds.

These are the chief features of the Monday country. There are no large coverts in it, and its extent is not great, but so well preserved and cared for are its coverts that it affords ample sport for one day a week and even for an additional bye-day. When once clear of the Marston Hills or Laughton, the country, though undulating, has hills less steep and severe than those characteristic of the Cottesmore and some parts of the Billesdon country round Keythorpe or Goadby. Thus, offering as it does chances of excursions into the best of the Pytchley and the Atherstone countries, besides its own excellent grass, the country hunted on Monday by Mr. Fernie's hounds is a very attractive one, and adds not a little to the fame of Harborough as a hunting centre.

One of the charms of Market Harborough is the variety of the sport which is attainable from there. Some people are very fond of change. They like to see a new country, to watch the methods of a strange huntsman and the powers of a pack of hounds hitherto unknown. Now, on Monday the man from Market Harborough has always two and it may be three

courses open to him. One of these has already been sketched. The second is to join the Woodland Pytchley, which is seldom far from the town on Monday, and in the spring and autumn enlarges its fields very much from Harborough. In the depth of the winter the visitor will find small fields with the Woodland Pytchley, but a charming stretch of country, stiff though well gated, within his reach. It is necessary to take out a quick, handy, stout horse, for the country is hilly, the woods may be deep, and it is hardly necessary to remark that the pleasure of the day is dependent on being able to see the hounds working. The woodland pack has been famous for its hounds for the past five-and-twenty years. Although the open country of the North Pytchley, particularly the valley between Stoke Albany and the Welland river, is as charming a hunting ground as could be seen, yet for many reasons it is not altogether an easy one to cross. It is worth the ride to the fixture to see Dingley Warren drawn, so picturesque is its situation, and it is not unlikely to lead to a pleasant gallop. Foxes do not very often cross into Mr. Fernie's country, and thus a pleasant bit of country round Great Bowden and out towards Sutton seldom hears the cry of hounds, unless Mr. Stokes's Harriers happen to cross it. But the Woodland Hounds do sometimes go that way, and those who saw it will not soon forget the run of 1901 from Dingley to Sheepthorns, when once the railway was passed and the wired tract of country cleared, that marred the earlier stages of the run.

Nor does this exhaust the resources of Monday, for occasionally the Pytchley are quite within reach, and indeed a short train journey towards Northampton will almost always enable you to see that hunt if you

care to leave certain sport close at hand for chances equally good but farther afield. The man, however, who loves hounds will naturally watch for the chance of seeing the Pytchley dog pack, as it is generally the bitches that hunt round Market Harborough. But if the visitor is one of those to whom a hound is a hound, whose chief business it is to get out of the way of his horse's feet, then Monday with Mr. Fernie should never be missed.

Tuesday generally offers a choice. If the Cottesmore is selected, then a horse-box must be ordered for Tilton or John o' Gaunt, unless, indeed, Loddington or Tilton Wood or Robin-a-Tiptoes is on the card, and then the distance may easily be done by road. Most probably Mr. Fernie will be out, but he may be at Blaby Wharf or somewhere in the Leicester district, where he has a little strip of country lent him by the Quorn, which, however, the growing prosperity of Leicester is rapidly curtailing; or again he may be at Rockingham Station or Seaton, in a country which is as wild and picturesque as the Leicester end is tame and suburban. If none of these courses suit the hunting man, Tuesday will not be a bad day for going up to town on business or taking a rest. It is not obligatory in Market Harborough to hunt six days a week. Tuesday is market-day at Harborough, and of the many sportsmen who live in the town there are few but have some business on that day to prevent them from hunting.

It is not possible for the Market Harborough visitor to think of his first Wednesday without a thrill. There is magic about such names as Lilbourne, Crick, Stanford and the Hemplow, which draws us almost against our will. We know that there will be a greater crowd, but not necessarily better sport, here than elsewhere

in the Pytchley country. Indeed, it is quite possible that the man who goes out with the Pytchley on a Wednesday for the first time will return home sore and disappointed. He has not seen any great sport, but he has been crushed at gateways, thwarted at gaps, the foxes have perchance run round in circles, or if one had seemed inclined to run straight he was promptly chased by a cur dog, of which there are a superabundance in the field. There is not much wire, but still there is some ; and a stranger is very likely to run up against it. It is not improbable that, going out full of hope to one of the fixtures aforesaid, he will spend the morning running a bewildered fox round about Kilworth or Cold Ashby, and the afternoon in hoping against hope that a fox may be persuaded to leave the Hemplow. When at last a fox does get away, he goes perhaps to ground at Welford. Nor will the stranger's feelings of disappointment be less when he has perceived that it is a country of delightful grass fields, not perhaps so extensive as parts of the Quorn or of Mr. Fernie's Thursday country, but with fences of much the same character. Prizes for hedge-cutting are given in the hunt, and there are not nearly so many rails in the fences as in some other parts. I believe it is a country of good wild foxes, and it is well preserved. There is a saying in Leicestershire that a certain village contains "more dogs than honest men." If the honest men and the dogs are equal in numbers in some parts of both Leicestershire and Northamptonshire, the standard in the two counties must be high.

A keen observer, and one who knows the hunting country well, has remarked "that every Field has its own character." A cricketer has said that the difference between hunting in Leicestershire and North-

amptonshire is like that between playing at Lord's or the Oval. The real fact is that there are more people and less room in the Pytchley country than in many other parts of the Shires. The difficulties in the field with these hounds have been hit off by the same keen observer quoted above. "If anything will teach one to gallop, it is riding for a bridle gate in the company of three or four hundred people, none of whom are morbidly civil. You must get there and get there soon, as it is the only visible means of securing a start, or getting into the next field. Sometimes one's horse has a sensitive habit of backing when he is pressed, which allows every one to pass you. In any case you will have a horse's head under each arm, a spur against your instep, a kicker with a red tape in his tail pressed against your favourite mare, with the doubtful consolation of being told when the iron of his hoof has rattled against her foreleg that 'it was too near to have hurt her.' Your hat will be knocked off by an enthusiast pointing to the line the fox is taking, and your eye will dimly perceive the pack swinging over the ridge and furrow, like swallows crossing the sea, two fields ahead of you."

It would be impossible to improve on the vividness or realism of that sketch, which has the advantage of being written by one who knew. "No one," continues the writer, whose judgment may possibly have been a little coloured by her love for Melton—"no one is responsible for the manners of a field which is largely made up of specials from Rugby, Leamington and Banbury. A Northamptonshire hunting man is as nice a fellow as there is in England, . . . but the struggle for existence in the field with hard riding casualties has hardened his heart and embittered his speech."

But the number of people who ride hard will always be limited, and so will those who see a run. Yet there is no sweeter country to ride over than this Wednesday tract of the Pytchley. In this lies Lilbourne Gorse, from which it is a standing wonder that any fox ever succeeds in breaking, so closely is it hemmed in with the railway. Crick, too, is one of those fixtures that every one has heard about who knows of or cares anything for fox-hunting at all. Misterton, Kilworth Sticks and Stanford may be added to the above, and the reason of the fame of such coverts is that all around there lies a beautiful grass country, divided by fences which are just big enough to need that hounds should run for riders to cross them freely. For while there are a very few people who will always, fast or slow, ride the line conscientiously with the hounds, there are many more whose nerve will hardly permit them to ride freely over the grass countries unless they are warmed by pace and excitement. Whyte-Melville says somewhere that courage in the hunting-field is a question of caloric. Certain it is that a low thermometer reduces the number of riders to hounds, while warm weather tempts even middle-aged men to deeds of daring which they thought they had left behind with their youth.

There is something, too, in the very name of these coverts which stimulates the fox-hunter. Crick Gorse to Hillmorton and thence to Lilbourne is a short but very pretty gallop. It owes something of its charm to the fact that the fields are generally level as a polo ground, and the fences, though now and then guarded by big ditches, are fair. This ride should be done with a scent in perhaps something less than twenty minutes, yet, unless your horse is a very

wonderful stayer you will not grudge the almost inevitable delay at Lilbourne.

No notes on the Wednesday country, however, would be complete without a word of those famous places Stanford Park and the Hemplow. On a Wednesday you are more than likely to find yourself in one, and possibly in both these places. Stanford Park (Lord Braye) is a place where foxes are looked upon with favour, and they return the good feeling by haunting its pleasant coverts. From Stanford there are pleasant lines to Misterton, often by way of Swinford, or, again, over the river Avon to the Hemplow Hills. These hills are one of the most striking features of the whole country. Their rugged outline and picturesque undulations make the Hemplow a conspicuous landmark. Naturally foxes love them, and often make their way thither. It is the key of this side of the Pytchley and needs to be drawn often lest foxes should hang there too long. During the past season (1903) the Hemplow has been well drilled. Naturally its steep sides, and its coverts that tempt a fox to cling to them for safety, and the long waits which are thus rendered necessary are not altogether popular. Yet without the Hemplow this side of the Pytchley would be a far less certain country for foxes than it is.

But the coverts already mentioned do not exhaust the charms of the Wednesday country. From Thornby to Naseby or Longhold is a pleasant gallop. Winwick and Elkington are places with associations of sport, though I seem to recall some rather awkward ravines and nullahs round the latter. The stranger who finds himself anywhere, say, between West Haddon and Hemplow will be wise to select a pilot until he can ride alone. It matters little here how good you are

or how bold your horse may be, for this is a country that requires to be known. Where the bridge is that crosses the ravine, where the hand gate in the impracticable fence, and where the road is barred by wire are pieces of knowledge that may prevent the loss of a good run. Then, as you jog back at night (and the probabilities are in favour of your having little or no more distance to traverse on your return than when you rode out in the morning), you will probably reflect that, in spite of some serious drawbacks, there are few better countries to hunt over than this corner of Northamptonshire. The drawbacks are that the villages are rather too close, the sheep dogs too many, and sometimes the latter are used for the purpose of turning the fox away from land where he is not welcome. There is some wire too, and the crowd has already been spoken of. Of possible remedies for these ills I have written elsewhere, and, having conducted my hunting friend back to his pleasant quarters at the "Angel" at Harborough or wherever else he may be staying, I leave him to think over the sport of the past day and to anticipate the pleasures of the morrow. For to the Market Harborough hunting man, be he resident or visitor, Thursday has always been the day of the week to look forward to.

The memory of most people now hunting hardly goes back beyond Mr. Tailby's Thursdays, when the Master and Frank Goodall showed such marvellous sport over this country and gave Market Harborough for a time all the fashion of Melton. But, as a matter of fact, long before that time this particular tract of high Leicestershire was already famous for sport. The country lies to the north and east of the old coach road from Market Harborough to Leicester. It

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is for the most part a grazing country, of which the quality is borne witness to by the grand bullocks seen in the fields. It is a district of huge fields and of strong fences, and within its compass are some of the strongest of the still surviving "oxers," of which fine specimens may be seen on the ride from Skeffington village to Rolleston. The Skeffington Vale is noted for its severity, and I have often wondered what was the exact line the Hon. Crasher took when he led Mr. Sawyer to Tilton in the fog. I imagine he went by Langton Cauldwell over by Stanton Wyville, which would be a quite possible line, though not exactly one we should choose to ride over in cold blood. At all events this portion of Mr. Fernie's country is one of the most famous parts of the old Quorn territory, nor, so far as I can judge, is it much gone off since the days when Assheton Smith declared that the foxes of Glooston and Stanton were the stoutest in Leicestershire. It was only a week before I write that a fox from Glooston Wood was killed after having given the hounds four runs. One of these runs only was a half circle, the other three being to points of which the shortest was eight miles. Curiously enough, on the occasion the fox was killed he had the longest start of any of those four days, and I am inclined to think there was not so good a scent on this occasion as on the others. It is also to be noticed, while we are on the subject of stoutness, that this fox was run twice within a week, the first time being a Friday and the second the following Thursday. Then came a week's interval and a brilliant ring on the Thursday following, and lastly a straight point into the Cottesmore country on Thursday, March 5, 1903. This does not look like a falling off in stoutness in the foxes of the district.

The Glooston Wood side of the country, which is also that nearest Market Harborough, is not so popular with the hard riders as the Leicester portion, though I think on the whole figures would show that most of the best sport is found on the Keythorpe side of the country. Yet there can be no doubt that for short and brilliant bursts such coverts as Glen Gorse, Norton Gorse, Thurnby and Sheephorns, not to mention Stoughton New Covert, which ought in process of time to open a way into some of the best of the Quorn Friday country, are excellent. But during many weeks of the season both sides of this country are hunted in the same week, on Thursday and Friday, the hunt card I have before me announcing Burton Overy and Keythorpe on these days for the second week in March.

But let us begin with some of the coverts farthest from Market Harborough, though our hardier forefathers would have regarded the distance to, say, Oadby Tollbar, as nothing. "I should hope no fox-hunter would think twenty miles too far to ride to covert," writes one of them. Well, I suppose Oadby is twelve miles from Harborough, and we now think it quite far enough. We may begin the day with Knighton Spinneys or some of those coverts which always hold foxes and show that the good town of Leicester has not forgotten the days when it was a fashionable hunting centre, and when Lord Gardner and others made the "Bell" at Leicester almost as well known as a hunting inn as the "George" or the "Harborough Arms" at Melton. There are foxes in this part, though not much room to hunt them in. I have, indeed, seen hounds work out a line over the golf links, or run a fox to earth under the grand stand of the racecourse. This part of the day we accept

with what patience we may, but the interest thickens when we come to Glen Gorse. What a wonderful covert this is! Placed close to a highroad, and that a busy one, not very large but very thick in its undergrowth, for more than a hundred years Glen Gorse has been drawn by fox-hounds from October to April, and seldom drawn blank. So thick was the undergrowth that in Mr. Osbaldeston's time the foot-people were accustomed to go in with hounds to drive out the fox. Indeed they horrified Nimrod, who, like all sportsmen, was something of a purist in hunting matters, by their very unorthodox conduct. It was the custom to collect shillings from the field—I presume *before* the fox was found—as payment for the services of these beaters.

Whenever I wait in the road outside Glen Gorse, I recall the incident of the Leicestershire country lads approaching Nimrod, who was the neatest and most precise of men. "If you threw Apperley into a horse-pond, he would come out clean and well dressed," declared one of his friends. He also liked things in order in the hunting field, so when they came to him for his shilling he read them a little lecture which must, I think, have considerably mystified a pre-board-school rustic. "Fox-hunting," said Nimrod, "has already lost much of its native wildness, but if men, not hounds, are to find our foxes we must soon leave them to men to kill, as every covert in the country would be surrounded by foot-people and every chance of a fox getting away would be lost." Whether, without the bestowal of shillings, some part of this prophecy has not come true, I leave it to those who know this side of the country to determine. At all events we must agree that Nimrod was right. Leicestershire foxes are wonderfully bold in facing a

crowd and disregarding holloas, but still it taxes the skill of a huntsman to bring his hounds out and steady them on the line when they are excited by the shouts around them. "If the members of a deaf and dumb institution kept hounds," says Whyte-Melville on this point, "what a lot of foxes they would kill."

Nimrod goes on to describe the start such as we often see it to-day—six couple of hounds away and the leaders of the field alongside them, the other hounds racing up to join their sisters in front, the crash of the hedges and the rattle of the timber. Personally, I delight in a find from Glen Gorse; it is so charming a transformation scene. We start from the prosaic highroad, along which one of the hateful machines driven by steam is labouring and rattling with a trolley behind it. We edge up a narrow, muddy lane with the covert on the right and a couple of "this-land-to-be-let-on-building-lease" sort of suburban fields on the left. There is a scrimmage through a gate, and lo, there stretch before us the green uplands of Leicestershire. "The Vale of Cashmere of hunting countries," says Nimrod; but if he had been to Srinagar, he would not have thought this a sporting simile. Under our horses' hoofs the turf is far firmer and more springy since it was drained than it was in Nimrod's time; for Leicestershire, I have heard from oldsters in my youth, was terribly deep before the present system of drainage was adopted. The fences are the same, save that here, even more than elsewhere, the "oxer" has disappeared. But in the rough and ragged bit of country below Stoughton things look much as they did a century back.

Another writer who rode a run from Norton Gorse,

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some twenty years later than Nimrod, describes the fences well and from the point of view of one who took them as they came.

Norton Gorse comes in the draw on the same day as Glen. It is a small artificial covert, very thick and well cared for, for Mr. Fernie's huntsman takes a great interest in the well-being of the coverts. It was from this then our stranger started, and after meeting the well-known brook, which you may have to jump or ford according to the place the fox strikes it, he says, "One of the most awkward fences was one of the latter" (an ox fence), "from one grass land into another, sloping down to it with a drop on the other side and a very bad approach, the rail dark coloured and hardly discernible." This the writer cleared, as not a few would do to-day, and his words describe not unfairly some of the obstacles.

Indeed, this is a country for a quick, bold horse, to say nothing of the man that rides him. Not long ago hounds ran from Thurnby, a long narrow covert of thorn and trees in a small dip, to Glen. This country carries a burning scent at times, and on this occasion hounds only hesitated twice, once when for a moment they were carried over the line near Little Stretton, and once when their fox was headed near Glen, but it is a beautiful characteristic of this pack—Mr. Fernie's bitches—that when once settled on the line, no hounds could lose less time in casting themselves for the scent, if for a minute they lose it, or in picking it up again. They can always beat horses, especially over this country, when there is anything of a scent. So well, too, are foxes preserved and so carefully are these coverts kept that the three coverts I have named, together with a few spinneys, generally suffice for a whole day's

sport, while there is always the famous Sheepthorns in reserve.

This last is an extraordinarily thick little covert, of which I have heard it said that its growth is so close that while the hounds are searching underneath, the fox can run about on the tops of the bushes. In any case it is a difficult covert to draw, but the foxes understand the game and play fair, for they seldom hang long. They go away of their own accord up over the hill under Carlton Clump—a landmark that can be seen for miles—and across to Shangton Holt, which has hardly been worthy of its past fame in late years, or to Noseley. In bygone days from Glen to the Coplow was a common line, but I have not seen or heard of foxes going there recently.

This brings us to the Friday country, and if Mr. Fernie's card should summon you on a Friday you will do well to go. The Quorn will draw away a good many people, and there will be no crowd. Here then you will find the benefits of the provinces and the advantages of Leicestershire combined. Moreover, all the meets are within an easy reach of Harborough, and it is only in the case of an unusual run that you will have far to ride home; and then you will not grudge the distance. If these hounds have a great run, it will be from Slawston, Glooston, Stonton or Noseley that it will begin. All writers tell how hounds once flew from Slawston to Shangton Holt, a more likely line before these comparatively modern coverts at Rolleston or Noseley were planted. It took them just sixteen minutes to go to Shangton from Slawston, which shows that the pace of hounds has not greatly increased since then. But we had a greater run still in the season 1901-2. Hounds found a fox in Mr.

W. W. Tailby's covert at Slawston, and ran eleven miles to a rabbit hole on the other side of Botany Bay. Probably they changed at Noseley, but Mr. Philip Beatty, who generally manages to be with them when they run, told me he had never seen hounds go faster than they did when they left Noseley. The fox, or foxes, ran the centre of the fields and was scarcely off the direct course all the way. This is another instance of a truth I have long been convinced of, that if it were not for wire fox-hunting is as good now as ever it was. Never in the history of the sport have great runs been of everyday occurrence, but as they still are, the exception rather than the rule. It is curious that Nimrod should a hundred years ago make precisely the same complaint about short running foxes that we do to-day.

Another very delightful bit of country is that round Rolleston. This is one of the houses that is bound up with the history of hunting. It was the home of Mr. Greene, "the fly," so called from the lightness of his hand on a horse. Mr. Greene was once Master of the Quorn and one of the best and most graceful horsemen who ever crossed Leicestershire. In the hands of the present owner, Lord Churchill, Rolleston has lost nothing of its attractions for hunting men, for its coverts always hold foxes, while the house is a pleasant feature in the midst of a fine stretch of country. Beyond this, again, is Keythorpe Hall, on the very borders of the Cottesmore. This is the residence of the Master, Mr. Fernie, and its coverts swarm with foxes. From here are drawn the Rams Head, the Moor Hill Spinneys and Vowes Gorse, the last said to have been planted for Mr. Osbaldeston by a farmer of that day who was an admirer of the

“Squire.” It is an excellent covert, and picturesque withal. Indeed, the whole of this country gives us on a good day a series of most attractive hunting pictures, with its grassy valleys and bland, easy slopes leading up to the hills, and the little circular spinneys in the park which before now have been known to hold a fox.

Friday is for the dweller at Market Harborough a day which is bound to be pleasant, for if he does not find himself hunting in the country I have been describing, he will in every alternate week have the Pytchley at his very doors. Clipston, Oxendon and Farndon are all within five miles of the town, and all are within hail of Waterloo Gorse, one of the most famous in the Shires. It is perhaps a covert which lives on the memory of the past, and even now when wire has to a certain extent obviated the necessity for rails, it is surrounded by a very stiff bit of country which no one can be blamed for shirking. The fences are just too big for a brave man on a good horse, even with the stimulus of pace. In the Thursday country, of which I have just been writing, a hard rider who is properly mounted can, when hounds run hard, cross the fences in fair safety, but in parts of the Oxendon and Clipston country he cannot, and thus the enjoyment of what is an excellent scenting and pleasant bit of grass is reduced. Brooksby, who certainly cannot be accused of pusillanimity in the matter of fences, declares that this country is a hindrance to the prosperity of Harborough. Yet there are lines which are possible enough. Suppose, for example, that the fox crosses the road towards Farndon (and I have seen him do so ere now), you can by using the road shirk the three or four stiffly fenced fields that intervene between you and the top

of the hill to the right of the village. Once here, it is fairly plain sailing over a hilly rolling country to Sibbertoft and Hothorpe, whence a fox may go by Theddingworth to the Laughton Hills, or swing round by way of Bosworth Hall to Sulby. Sibbertoft is itself a meeting-place which commands a pleasant country and some good coverts. Sulby to Long Hold and Naseby Thorns, and so on to Cottesbrooke or to Scotland Wood or Kelmarsh, and over the road to Arthingworth, whereabouts is no wire nor will be while the present squire has a voice in the matter. There is Foxhall and Faxton Corner, and nearer Harrington, on the way back to Harborough, there is Loatland Wood, a frequent draw. Some pleasant country lies beyond, though there is a brook with a very boggy crossing, where a horse and rider coming after it has been well poached up by the field are likely to stay for the remainder of the afternoon. It is on the whole a pleasant, rather varied, hunting-like country, where foxes are plentiful and are often stout and wild.

On a Friday or Saturday alternately the sportsman can hunt in a country which is in many respects different from the Thursday district, but none the worse for the change and variety it offers. Probably this side of Harborough is as well known to men from other countries as any, for the town is wont to bid its friends to the United Counties Hunt Ball once a year and to take them out to see Waterloo Gorse or Loatland Wood drawn by the Pytchley the next day. Friday or Saturday will be spent with the Pytchley, and on whichever day you are not summoned to meet that pack Mr. Fernie will offer sport in a corner of his territory that is bounded between the Eye brook and the railway. This is not so highly

favoured as some of the rest of that choice little country, but it is very good all the same. There are few prettier valleys in Leicestershire than that of the Eye, on one slope of which is a chain of small patches of woodland stretching from Allexton and Stockerston to Nevill Holt, with Watson's Gorse last of all just above the Kennels at Medbourne, and looking over the Welland Vale in the Woodland Pytchley towards Wilbarston and Stoke Albany. Just over the brook on the opposing slope to Stockerston are Wardley Wood and Stoke End, two beautiful Cottesmore coverts. What more natural than that a fox should cross from one to the other and then run out towards the Fitzwilliam borders by way of Lyddington, or across by the Quaker's Spinney to the Manton Valley! This does happen from time to time, and it is always present as a possibility. In any case there are plenty of foxes and much sport in a quiet way on Mr. Fernie's side of the brook. Nor is there often a crowd to hinder us from seeing what sport there is. Sometimes too, but more rarely because of the railway, a fox will run from Blaston Spinneys by way of Vowes Gorse into the Thursday country. But these woods, though not very extensive, have a value to the hunt in that they are practically the only woodlands within its limits.

Nor is the meeting of Mr. Fernie's your only chance of seeing hounds in this country, for the Cottesmore will often come to Wardley on that day, meeting it is true at some distance from Harborough, but not so far as to be out of reach. Living as I did one winter beyond Harborough, I seldom missed a Saturday with the Cottesmore for the sake of seeing the hounds and the huntsman in these delightful coverts, where sport is almost a certainty. A friend, too, who like many

other good comrades of the hunting-field, gave his life in South Africa, told me that when he was staying at Melton he never grudged a fifteen-mile ride to see Wardley drawn, and Harborough is quite four miles nearer to the coverts than Melton. Indeed, as a visitor who did not mind big fences once remarked, some of the best country is nearer Harborough than anywhere else.

I am inclined to think that the future of Market Harborough lies in its being chosen as a centre round which people will buy or build houses. It is indeed a pleasant place all the year round, and the country, especially on the Rockingham and Northamptonshire side, is beautiful and interesting and rich in historic and hunting associations. In any case Market Harborough is a pleasant old town with the grace of antiquity clinging to it. May it be long before so-called modern improvements spoil it, as they have spoiled so many other picturesque old English towns!

There is one other attraction that Market Harborough possesses for the sportsman, and that is a most excellent polo ground and a well-managed club, of which Sir Humphrey de Trafford is President, and Mr. Philip Beatty, Secretary. The polo ground is boarded, and is of fine old turf in a pleasant and picturesque spot between Lubenham and Farndon. Most hunting men like to play polo in the summer, and Market Harborough is so accessible that it is easy for other clubs to visit it and for teams from that club to go elsewhere for matches. It is, indeed, an almost ideal situation for a polo club, and as it has been well supported and well managed, its existence may weigh with visitors when choosing a hunting centre. Play is kept up well into the cub-hunting

season, and begins ere “ to finish the season ” appears on the cards of the fixtures. I may indeed finish this chapter as I began it with an echo of the oft-quoted words of Mr. Sawyer : “ The very place. I wonder I never thought of it before ! ”

CHAPTER IV

RUGBY, LEICESTER, NORTHAMPTON AND GRANTHAM

Advantages of Rugby—Its Train Service and Polo—Choice of Packs—Three days a week sure—Monday with Mr. Fernie's, with the Pytchley, or with the Atherstone—Tuesday with Mr. Fernie or with the Quorn—Wednesday with the Pytchley—Thursday and Friday with the Warwickshire Packs or Atherstone—Stiff Fences—Difficult Country—Nimrod's Story—Reasons for choosing Rugby—Leamington—Advantages of Hunting—The Epwell Hunt Poem—Leicester and Northampton—Tom Firr—His last Fall—Tuesday with the Quorn—Hotels and Inns—Freedom of the Midlands—Grantham—The Blankney and Southwold—The Belvoir—Horses required—Grantham a Sporting Town—Lincolnshire Huntsmen—A Hard Country—Will Wells—Character of Country round Grantham—Colonel Fane's Busy Day—Mr. Vickerman's Diary again quoted—Captain Micklethwaite—Folkingham—Two Great Runs in 1895—Studying the work of the Belvoir Hounds.

I. RUGBY.

RUGBY is another town which has great attractions for a man who likes polo as well as hunting, and commends itself as an all the year round residence. It is not in itself, apart from its famous school, its hunting, its polo, and the fact that it has a splendid railway service, a very attractive town. But the neighbourhood and the suburbs are delightful, and it is a centre rather to take a house near than to stay at as a chance visitor. On the other hand, there is no better place, on account of the North-Western

Railway train service, to keep horses at if you yourself require to be often in London. It is easy to leave town in the morning and always easy to return to it at night after hunting. In the same way, if you live at Rugby it is quite possible to go up to town and back with far less trouble and wear and tear than you would have in reaching many suburbs of London from the Metropolis itself. Rugby is, in fact, in point of time and convenience not so very much farther off than Ealing or Wimbledon.

It is its train service, its polo and its school that are its chief attraction, for as a hunting centre Rugby is not to be compared for convenience with Melton or Market Harborough. From both these latter places you can, if you will, hunt sometimes in districts which, if not quite so fashionable, are nevertheless not so crowded as many, and you may have very good sport, but from Rugby you must always take your pleasure more or less in a crowd, and in one where the amenities are perhaps not so much considered as in the more leisurely atmosphere of Melton or Harborough. The main attraction to Rugby from a hunting point of view is the number of packs which, with a little assistance from the railway, it is possible to see from thence. There is perhaps no place in England where horse-boxes are so much used in the hunting season as Rugby. There is a line of railway belonging to the North-Western system running from Rugby to Market Harborough, which cuts right through some of the best of the Pytchley grass and effectually cuts off that country from Mr. Fernie's. It is very seldom that the Pytchley run across that line. But though this railway is to a certain extent a disadvantage, preventing the frequent recurrence of such gallops as we read of in

Mr. Osbaldeston's time from Waterloo to Cranoe or Slawston, yet to the Rugby hunting visitor or resident it is a great advantage, since it takes him easily to some such convenient spot as Welford station or Lubenham, which command alike most of the Monday country of Mr. Fernie's Hunt, and the Wednesday and Friday or Saturday territory of the Pytchley. Of the hunting and the nature of these countries I have already written, and there is no need to dwell on them again here.

The fact is that unless you are willing to box or are prepared for an inordinate amount of road work, Rugby is not a six days a week centre. Wednesday, Thursday and Friday are the days when hounds are sure to be within riding distance. In each case the country is of the best. On Monday sometimes, and Tuesday almost always, you will require the assistance of the railway, and Saturday generally needs a horse-box or demands a long trot. There is, in fact, for a man who desires to do nothing else but hunt, too much wear and tear about Rugby to make it a suitable centre. Yet it is a delightful neighbourhood for a sportsman to settle in, and no one who is at home in a hunting country dislikes a day or so off in the week. For the business man, as we have seen, it is very convenient, and the fact that you cannot easily do six days a week from Rugby is no real drawback to the place, for the men who hunt every day are the exception rather than the rule. It is also obvious that for six days a week Melton, Oakham, or Market Harborough and their neighbouring villages are unquestionably the most convenient. Nevertheless, although it may be true that we do not hunt every day, it is desirable to know what is possible on each succeeding day of the week. A busy man may find

it impossible to hunt on one day, and that another is open to him on the following day is a matter of interest.

On Monday, then, a Rugby man will choose Mr. Fernie's as being within a long ride or an easy train journey. Or again, with or without the help of the same useful covert hack, the Pytchley or the Atherstone would be open to him. Then on Tuesday I do not see how a long journey is to be avoided if you hunt at all. As most people, however, have a day off some time, this would be a good one to take. I may note, however, that on Tuesday it is often possible to reach Mr. Fernie by train to Leicester or Market Harborough, according to the fixture for that day. You will not find him in his most fashionable country, but the sport may be none the worse for that. Tuesday is thus the most difficult day to provide for from Rugby. Brooksby suggests that it should be spent with the Quorn, and this might not be a bad plan. The Quorn on Tuesday hunt in a country which is not without its attractions for the sportsman. Of that district, however, I shall have more to say when I come to Leicester. Wednesday will be spent with the Pytchley of course, in a country which belongs equally to Market Harborough, and which has been written of when dealing with that place as a hunting centre.

The special glory of Rugby is found in the Thursday and Friday countries, when the two Warwickshire packs and the Atherstone offer their best and fairest hunting grounds to the sportsman. Wednesday it shares with Harborough, and the alternate Fridays and Saturdays belong entirely to that town. But Thursday, when the Warwickshire are in their Shuckburgh country, or the North Warwickshire at Hill-

morton, is a day to look forward to. Nor is it only the country which is the attraction. The Warwickshire hounds have a peculiar character of their own. The late Lord Willoughby de Broke determined to build up a pack for his country, and the square-headed muscular dog pack are hounds that can race and hunt. Indeed, they hunt while they race, for they are seldom off the line, and the pace they go is the result of condition and stamina. No pack more seldom over-runs the line, and even a Thursday crowd will fail to carry them far. It is this pack, and the way they have been and are hunted, as much as the admirable country which has raised Warwickshire to the level of the Shires and drawn men who love to hunt as well as ride to live within its borders. I can recollect the day when the Warwickshire Hunts were scarcely allowed to be within the limits of the Shires; but, whether they are so technically or not, no one who was writing of our best countries could omit these packs. Certainly they will receive a large share of attention from the Rugby man, who will find much of his pleasure in riding over the Warwickshire or North Warwickshire Hunt countries. The two packs are almost on the outskirts of Rugby on Thursdays, and even the boldest riders must speak of the Shuckburgh country with respect. You may cross it with either the Warwickshire pack on Thursday, or again the Pytchley may run over it on alternate Saturdays. But whenever you do find yourself in it, you will need your very best horse.

Warwickshire is nearly as stiffly fenced as any part of Leicestershire, "so little differ as makes no matter," as the country people say. The enclosures however are, though of fair size, not so large, and the ground a little softer. There is perhaps rather more arable,

but it seems to me that in the last twenty years there has been a great increase in the grass land of this hunt, not only on the Birmingham side, where the change is very notable, but to a certain extent all over the Warwickshire and North Warwickshire hunting districts. Thus a horse here, as in the Pytchley, needs to be stout as well as bold, clever as well as fast. He must jump high at the stout quickset growing strong out of the rich soil, and must spread himself to cover the ditches which are invariably to be found on one side or the other. He must be able to face stiff timber, for a stile will sometimes be the best way out of the field. Nor must he dislike water, for if the brooks are not as a rule large, yet they come fairly often, and a horse which dislikes water is as likely to stop at four feet as at fourteen.

Altogether this Thursday country is not an easy one. I have seen it indeed crossed by a pony, but then there are ponies that will do anything. This mare, "Freckles," ridden by a lady who came of a family of horsemen and horsewomen, was a wonder, but there is no doubt that with a suitable weight and well ridden there is nothing the modern polo pony cannot do. I have known at least two other polo ponies that have crossed grass countries with pleasure to their riders and credit to themselves. Doubtless there are many more. There is a story in Warwickshire of a friend of Mr. Meynell's who came to live in Warwickshire. He thought the country cramped. "A man who has hunted several seasons in Leicestershire is spoiled for any other country," he remarked. "Warwickshire could not show a run; there is not room in it." But one day hounds found a stout fox at Walton Wood and killed him a mile and a half from Southam at Watergall in the Thursday

country. Only three or four were up at the end, and among them was not the gentleman from Leicestershire, to whom, when he appeared, Mr. Canning said, raising his voice to its highest pitch, "Now, Mr. Hawkes, can Warwickshire show a run?"

Writing of the same run, Nimrod, who knew the country well, tells a story which narrates no uncommon occurrence and amuses by its appeal to our common experience. "We had but two momentary checks, and all but the first mile was over grass. There was a very hard riding gentleman out on a new purchase. 'A superior horse,' he said at the first check, and certainly he went right in front five miles farther and checked in the middle of a large cow pasture. 'D—d superior horse,' said my friend, patting him in the neck. 'Don't be in a hurry, it is not over yet.' In fact, I spoke from appearances. I had just heard him rap the top bar of a stile in a rather alarming manner. After the run was over the owner of the superior horse was inquired after. He had last been seen some miles in the rear leading the superior horse down a lane." The moral of this story seems to be that as the horse had got so far, he *was* a very superior horse, but in very inferior condition.

Friday, too, with the Atherstone close to Rugby is a day in which sport is sure to be over a delightful country. "It holds a good scent, is easy and gentlemanlike to cross, and the Leicestershire side is very good indeed." So wrote Nimrod, who once lived at Bilton, close to Rugby, and what he then said is as true now as it was then, save that the London and North-Western and Great Central Railways run through it and so far hinder sport, for railways, even if they do not confuse the foxes, are a hindrance and a danger to hounds. No master can be free from anxiety

when he sees his hounds casting themselves, intent only on the chase, on the top of a lofty embankment, with an express train due from one direction or even perhaps from both. Nevertheless, with all possible deductions, there are few better countries than the Atherstone portion of Leicestershire. A fixture at Brownsover or Coton House, Newnham Paddox or Bitteswell is sure to bring all hunting Rugby, not to speak of the Pytchley residents who live along the border, and thus command the two superlative countries on either side of the railway and canal. From Coton to Swinford is a possible line and a pleasant one. There is but one railway barrier, and then all the pleasures of the Pytchley are open. In fact, all the best country round Rugby is Leicestershire, or shall we say, to give a wider scope, the grass countries at their best. Description then becomes repetition, and, though riding after hounds over the grass never palls, yet to write more of it might weary the reader, and he would learn little that has not been said already.

So it will be understood that the man who chooses Rugby will do so because he desires to ride over well-fenced grass, and must therefore mount himself accordingly, and also because he likes the pleasant society of men of the same tastes as himself. The same country can be reached from many towns and villages; and if a man desires quiet and has a small stud, there are worse places than the town of Atherstone, which is no great distance from the kennels at Witherley, and is pretty much in the centre of the country. There are of course those who rather shrink from than seek society in the hunting season, who find that early hours are easier kept in solitude, and that the recollection of to-day's sport and the antici-

pation of to-morrow's will pass away the time pleasantly enough. Round Rugby as a centre there are many pleasant villages, and hunting-boxes are to be found.

For those who like a more lively life Leamington has plenty of accommodation and plenty of amusements, and is a clean and pleasant town. It is quite true of course that an enterprising Leamington man could visit (by rail) the Quorn or more easily the Pytchley. Leamington, though a sporting town enough, and once the headquarters of chasing, is nowadays a place for a man to go with a small stud of useful horses and a hack, sure that he will there see as much sport as anywhere, and need not be dull if he can find amusement in a good club and pleasant society on the days when he does not hunt. In fact, it is one of those places where hunting is only one of several other recreations, and not as it must needs be at Melton and Oakham, the chief business of life for the time you are there.

Here I may be permitted the reflection that it is one of the advantages of hunting as a recreation for busy men that it takes them more out of themselves and away from the cares and worries of life than any other amusement. While you are hunting you have no time to think of anything else. It is not only physical exercise, but mental too. No thoughtless, careless, stupid man ever rode well to hounds through many long runs and during a series of years. Fox-hunting is a sport which attracts men of affairs. Distinguished soldiers naturally delight in it; it is by the love of such sports, indeed, that they have come to distinction. A man's youth soon leaves him if he has no game or sport to preserve it, and a soldier cannot afford to grow old or even

comfortably middle-aged, for directly he does so he ceases to be of much value. But we find not only soldiers coming into the hunting-field, but statesmen, and foreigners as well as Englishmen. Lawyers too, like that Serjeant Goulburn who was the delight of the Stratford-on-Avon Hunt Club for his powers of anecdote, and who wrote the Epwell Hunt Poem, a work which, as our friend Nimrod truly prophesied, has outlived the Serjeant's finest judicial orations. All these find in hunting a recreation which cannot be surpassed. Some men there are, too, whom games do not interest greatly, and such men often find in hunting and horsemanship the exercise and change of occupation which every busy man needs.

II. BUSINESS AND PLEASURE. LEICESTER AND NORTHAMPTON

Both Leicester and Northampton have been hunting centres in their day. Time was when the "Bell" at Leicester was a favourite resort. Many horses were stabled there. But to Leicester prosperity has since then come in another way, and the town would not now be chosen by any one who desired merely to hunt. Yet, for all that, Leicester has its hunting men, and in increasing numbers. Happily the old prejudice which regarded almost any sport or amusement as unprofessional or unbusiness-like is dying out. The English middle class, thanks to cricket, football, golf, and in many cases hunting, are ceasing to live lives that were truly the dulllest possible. Nearly every business man nowadays has some outdoor recreation which he makes his hobby. Nor is

it possible for a man to live in Leicester and love sport and not to think about hunting.

Those old sportsmen who chose Leicester as their centre were not far wrong. Oadby Tollbar, just four miles out, is an historic meet; Scraptoft is barely six or seven miles away, and Syston, though rather suburban, is not far from much good country of the Quorn. Then Leicester has all the Charnwood forest side of the Quorn, which seldom sees a Meltonian at its fixtures, and only now and then a few stray visitors by train from Rugby. I have often thought what splendid lessons in the science of fox-hunting those men must have had who were out with the late Tom Firr on this the less fashionable side of the Quorn. There are stout foxes and no crowd. The country is rough, with woodland and rocks in some parts and in others it is given over to tillage. There is always plenty of room for hounds to work. No one knew when the decisive moment had come to break through the rules of hunting and make a bold cast to avoid a crowd better than the late huntsman of the Quorn, yet no one took more pleasure in seeing his hounds work out a line patiently and steadily. There never was so notable an instance as Firr of the way in which a huntsman can influence a pack. His hounds always seemed to me to work above their form so to speak, and as a matter of fact they did not do so well in other hands. The pack he had to begin upon was the Craven which Mr. Coupland bought, and Firr in a few years made the hounds not specially notable in looks but wonderful in their work when he handled them. The Leicester sportsmen must have had some splendid days in watching his work.

The season in which these lines are being written

has been marked by some great runs on the Charnwood side, and indeed the Quorn had all their best sport there at the beginning of the season. The country is not attractive after the grass fields of Leicestershire, for, although the forest is a thing of the past, yet the coverts are thick and strong and of considerable extent. If, however, the country is well worked foxes will travel from it, and it has been remarked that this side is free from the stain of cattle and sheep, and from men and dogs. It is rather a dangerous country to ride over, and two famous hunt servants, Dick Burton and the late Tom Firr, both had severe falls among the stones and rocks; and it is well known that from the last fall he had in the forest Firr never really recovered. It was in that country too that the present master, Captain Burns-Hartopp, had a very severe accident. It is usual to keep horses specially for the forest side because of the liability to injury from the stones and walls which form part of the obstacles. For the fixtures on the south side of the Midland Railway from Leicester to Derby you may keep a cheaper stamp of horse, but if hounds go away from Bunny park on the north side of Barrow-upon-Soar or from Prestwold, the fox may lead his followers into a country which will test the best hunter Melton can produce to cross it. All this country is open to the Leicester man who may live and earn his daily bread there, or to the visitor from elsewhere who knows how to combine business with pleasure, and brings a horse with him or hires one from Mr. Hames.

But if the visitor came from a provincial country, I should not take him out on Tuesday with the Quorn, but endeavour to beguile him to wait for Thursday with Mr. Fernie, or Friday with the Quorn, for did

he only go out on Tuesday and see Bradgate Park or Bardon Hill, even though the sport would probably be excellent, yet he might well think that the county of Leicestershire was not all that it had been painted. For Bardon Hill is 900 feet above the level of the sea, and there is plenty of plough and woodland, as I have already pointed out. But the man who lives in Leicester or its suburbs and who makes the Quorn his own pack, following its fortunes for three or four days each week of the season, as leisure and fortune may permit, will sometimes feel that his lines are in pleasant places as compared with other business men who must train long distances or else not hunt at all. The Leicester man can ride or drive to most of the fixtures of his county hunt. The same remarks are true of Northampton, where the Pytchley is always within reach, and the Monday country lies at his doors, while Badby Wood is within a fairly easy distance. This is one of the best coverts in this or any hunt, and ranks with Wardley, Owston or Tilton as the home of stout foxes. The Monday country of the Pytchley however, which lies to the north of the town, is the peculiar territory of the Northampton man and is possibly one of the most sporting districts of Northamptonshire. Rougher than some parts, it yet gives us hunting in a varied form, the grass and plough, the woodland and the gorse being mingled in a charming variety, and yielding as a rule all the sport it promises.

Far away in the corner of the Pytchley are two places, Weedon and Daventry, which give the Grafton and Bicester as alternatives, but which also enable the sportsman to hunt with the Pytchley or to reach the Warwickshire. Weedon is a place where soldiers love to be stationed if they are fond of hunting, and



THE BELVOIR VALE

the old soldier who loves the sound of the bugle might do worse than take up his abode there. I have stayed at the "Globe," and found myself very comfortable. Weedon is even nearer to town than Rugby and almost as well served with trains. Daventry is quiet and out of the way, but with the air of homely English country life and sport about it, which is so delightful nowadays. It is four miles from Weedon and about fifteen from Northampton. It has a comfortable inn and commands the Pytchley, the Grafton and the Warwickshire. While I was stationed in India it was strongly recommended to me as a place to hunt from, and I went to look at it accordingly, and, had not the conveniences of Market Harborough drawn me, I should have gone there. I certainly recommend it to any one who likes quiet. Places that seem dull to the homekeeping folk appear very havens of peace to those whose lives have led them to wander widely. That is one of the charms of hunting in the Midlands, that you can do just as you please and suit your own tastes. The men who gather round the covert side are as a rule no more provincial in mind than in appearance, and each man is left to follow the sport in his own way, so that whether you like a gay watering-place or a quaint village or a sleepy little country town, you can find what you want and have the very best hunting, which is also surely on the whole the best sport in the world, at your doors.

III. GRANTHAM

There is, however, a place which deserves a more extended notice in a book like this than any other hunting centre save Melton or Market Harborough.

Grantham, a two hours' journey from King's Cross, is a pleasant town in the county which shares with Yorkshire the right to be called the most sporting in England. Indeed, the Yorkshire man loves the thoroughbred better even than horse or hound, while the latter are to the true Lincolnshire man the first objects of his admiration. Nor is this to be wondered at when we consider that for nearly two centuries this county has been hunted by the Brocklesby and Belvoir packs, and that besides these the Burton, the Blankney and the Southwold all hunt within its borders. That the blood of the Blankney pack is now the source of such famous kennels as the Woodland Pytchley at Brigstock, and the Pytchley at Brixworth is well known, while to the Belvoir and Brocklesby strains every kennel in England goes back. The whole country save the fen district is suitable for hunting. The very best of that hunting country is found round Grantham, a town which has a history connected with sport as long and as important as any in England. Grantham is a centre from which you can probably see as much hunting in the course of a season as from any town in England, for hounds are within reach four or five times in the week, and the Great Northern Railway is always there to act as covert hack.

The Belvoir hounds are less often stopped by frost than any pack in England, for the great variety of soils to be found within the borders of the hunt generally make it possible to hunt somewhere. For example, in the season of 1901-2, the worst I ever recollect, many packs were kept in kennel, as although it thawed by day it always froze at night, but the Belvoir were able to hunt when no other pack was out. Therefore if a man chooses Grantham as his

headquarters, he is likely to put in on the whole as many days' hunting in the course of the season as from any place, Melton only excepted. We shall find that Grantham has, and always has had, a certain number of regular visitors who, having once found it out, continue to go there year after year. Grantham has two excellent hotels, lodgings are to be found in the town, and stabling is to be rented.

But it is desirable to take a strong stud, in both numbers and quality, to Grantham. The foxes are stout, the Belvoir hounds travel fast, and the country is not one that can be taken lightly anywhere. Moreover, round Grantham it is not all grass, for there is plough and also some strong woodlands. If any one wishes to see the right type of horse to take to Grantham let him obtain permission to see Ferneley's portraits of Sir Thomas Whichcote's horses, which are let into the panels of the dining-room at Aswarby Hall. They are big blood horses, and the greatest pains was taken with their conditioning. It is better to have a somewhat inferior horse in really hard condition than a first-rate one short of muscle and thick in the wind from want of proper treatment. No one ever saw more sport than Sir Thomas Whichcote or rode so consistently to hounds. And he wisely never kept a bad horse and seldom parted from a good one. He knew and trusted his horses, and they obeyed his hand, both very important matters in crossing a strong country.

Grantham has always been a sporting town. Its bankers and its manufacturers, as well as the squires, the farmers and the parsons of the country round, are and always have been devoted followers of the Duke of Rutland's hounds. It was Grantham that, when agricultural depression made a hunt subscrip-

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tion necessary, raised £1500 a year and offered it to the late Duke without conditions, as a contribution to the poultry and damage fund. It was also, I believe, Grantham that prevented a division of the hunt, and to this we owe the fact that the historic hunt of Belvoir is still undivided. Grantham is the hunting capital of Lincolnshire, a county which has produced more hounds and huntsmen of note than any other. The families of the Smiths, the Thatchers and the Goodalls all handle fox-hounds, as Frank Gillard once said, as naturally as a setter or pointer takes to finding game.

It is perhaps not very surprising that Grantham and its neighbourhood have produced hard riders, for the ditches are deep, the rails strong and the fences, if neat and well kept, are not to be trifled with. When I was preparing to write the history of the Belvoir hunt, I drove, rode and cycled over the country round Grantham, Aswarby, Folkingham and other places, and it struck me as most sporting, but rather stiff. Will Wells, the huntsman successively of the Puckeridge and Hertfordshire, was a noted rider, and the following incident which he wrote to me himself may serve to illustrate what I have said. "The hounds were drawing Colonel Reeves' Gorse at Leadenham. Wells rode down to the bottom to view the fox away, and Mr. Clark, the great sheep-feeder, was there with a friend. He said, 'Will, if we find a fox how are you going to get over that fence?'—a very big ditch with a post and rails from me.—'Wait and see,' said Will, and at that very moment a fox broke. 'Now let us see,' said Mr. Clark, and Will, giving his horse a ten yards' run, flew the fence." *

* "History of the Belvoir Hunt," p. 328.

however, the foxes are stout and have always borne this character. An old squire of Boothby writes to Cooper begging him not to kill his foxes in the spring. "A woodland fox we cannot spare. You know well a good Boothby wood cub in the cub-hunting season to be worth a dozen in the Heath coverts for young hounds. I hope and trust you will not think of coming." *

It has been the glory of the Grantham district from a hunting point of view that it has produced so many hard riders, for whom no day was too long, no fence too big. Such are not merely followers of the hounds for the sake of a gallop, but they have a sound judgment and knowledge of hound-lore and the science of fox-hunting.

Now, let me go somewhat more into detail as to the country round Grantham. There is the Heath country, which consists of a considerable proportion of light plough divided by thorn fences, not very high, but stiff. Near Cranwell are some stone walls, and, as is usually the case where there are walls, there are few ditches, and the same may be said of Weever's Lodge and Newton Toll Bar close to Grantham on the Aswarby side of the country and near the fenland. In this direction you jump often out of deep and heavy soil over stiff fences, and the nearer you are to the Fens the bigger and deeper seem the ditches. The Belvoir Vale is partly under plough and is noted for the combination of stake and bound hedges and wide ditches, and there is the Stubton country, which has been long famous for sport and also for the severity of its fences. Between Stubton and Leadenham runs the river Brant, and about this district is told the story of Colonel Fane of Ful-

* "History of the Belvoir Hunt," p. 301.

beck, who is said to have been married, to have dropped in with the hounds afterwards near Stubton, got a good ducking in the Brant, and started for India all in one day. Nimrod describes the Stubton country thus: "I think I never did see one so strongly fenced. If I could have made use of the pencil, I would have brought away a sketch of one of them. It was a blackthorn hedge about eight inches higher than the top of my hat as I stood on the ground, with growers in it as thick as a man's thigh plashed at the top, and with a wide ditch on one side. On remarking to Mr. Robert Grosvenor that it was a stiff country, he observed that it was so to be sure, but, added he, a man has nothing to do but to throw his heart over and follow it. 'This is all very well,' thought I (and my readers will probably agree), 'but it is not every heart that will leap so high even when its owner gives the word.' " *

But not always did even the hard riding field throw their hearts over, for Will Goodall, the famous Belvoir huntsman, in a letter to Sir Thomas Whichcote, says: "It's really wonderful to see a body of old fox-hunters when hounds start off with their heads up and sterns down telling them over the very first field that there's no time to lose, to see them following one another over a weak place to avoid a rasper and thereby losing that portion of precious time which has gone for ever, thus verifying the old proverb that 'time and fox-hounds wait for no man.' " † This is a true enough picture, only it is a testimony to the hard riding of the Belvoir field that Goodall should have found such action wonderful. It is certain that in past days more people journeyed to

* Nimrod's "Hunting Tours," p. 219.

† "History of Belvoir Hunt," p. 193.

the Lincolnshire side from Melton than do now. We are told that besides the attractions of Goodall, some of the hard riding men used to go on purpose to take on Sir Thomas Whichcote on King Charming or some other of his magnificent horses.

Once more on the principle of trying to see ourselves as others see us, I give an extract from the graphic diary of Mr. Vickerman, who seems to have thought nothing of riding from Melton to Grantham, sixteen miles, and thence hacking the famous Cognac on to Aswarby. This is how the Lincolnshire side appeared to him. "The country round here was very rough and uninviting, smallish fields and a good deal of heavy plough"—there is more pasture nowadays—"and blind wide fences very unlike some of the country I had passed through on my way from Grantham, which though principally plough land seemed firm, with large fields and neat compact fences." They had a good gallop, and Mr. Vickerman, who early saw the "propriety of taking a line of my own," was with the hounds, and in the course of it "Cognac" (the writer always gives all the credit to his horse) "set the whole field twice. The first place looked on coming to it like an ordinary hedge with a widish ditch on the other side, but when taking it, it proved to be a Lincolnshire dyke, very wide in itself but with the earth dug away at this particular fence, materially increasing the width. While in the air I thought he must drop short, but he cleared it gallantly, and turning round I shouted to one of the whips who was following me that it was a bad place, but found that he did not need the hint, for neither he nor any one else attempted it. The second place occurred when hounds were running slowly, and in the latter part of the run I could

observe that the huntsman and all the field turned away from the line of the hounds into a road, but supposing this was to avoid a wide place I was not sorry to be left alone with a pulling horse. I soon perceived the cause of their taking to the road from a bank of earth rather recently thrown up, but this same bank prevented me from seeing exactly what I was coming to or its width, but seeing Goodall and those of the field who were parallel with me in the road turn in their saddles to observe what I should do, I concluded it was a wide place and therefore, selecting a portion of the bank which seemed sounder than the rest, I put 'Cognac' smartly at it for the honour of Essex, and he cleared the whole superbly, alighting right on the top of the bank of earth on its opposite side, causing Goodall to exclaim, 'Well done.' It proved to be a regular Lincolnshire dyke, with the width and difficulty much increased by having been recently cleared out and the earth thrown up on both sides. It certainly was a place to startle weak nerves, for I could see when crossing it that the sides were perpendicular and about ten or twelve feet deep, so that there would have been little chance of getting out in the event of a mistake." * We shall all agree that the honour of Essex was well sustained on this occasion, and our assent will be all the warmer if we have had any close acquaintance with Lincolnshire dykes. The same rider met many stiles and rails just as any one would do to-day ; indeed here, as I believe almost everywhere in the Shires, a timber jumper is a necessity.

There was in days gone by a very popular, if somewhat eccentric, visitor to Melton, Captain Micklethwaite, who was rather noted for his exploits in the

* "Leaves from a Hunting Diary in Essex," p. 337.

“Bold Tar who for so many winters
Has knocked our five-barred gate to splinters.
• • • • •
For when the hog-back stile appears
You forwards rush devoid of fears.
The stile collapses in a heap,
And through the wreck the funklers creep.”*

* From an unpublished copy of verses by Mr. J. E. Welby.

was never a pause or a hover till Woodwell Head was in sight ; when two fields short of this, the hounds cast themselves to the left and then to the right. One touched the line and with the Belvoir note, like a bell, called the others to him, swung round in the beautiful Market Overton valley, and marked the fox to ground at Edmonthorpe. From Buckminster to Woodwell Head, it is said, they took but twenty-three minutes, and seventeen minutes on to the finish. On New Year's Day, 1896, they ran the same line from Buckminster to Woodwell Head, and among those who saw and enjoyed this gallop were the late Lord Edward Manners, then field master of the Belvoir hounds, and M. Roy, a Frenchman who was ever constant to Grantham in the hunting season, though often going back to spend his Sundays in Paris.

When once on the subject of hunting from Grantham, it is tempting to linger, yet enough has been said to show that it is no bad centre for a man whose whole mind is set on hunting, yet who wishes to be within reach of London. The man who goes to Grantham should make up his mind to hunt chiefly with the Belvoir and to share the local interest in and enthusiasm for this famous pack. He should love hound work and study it, or he will lose half his pleasure. Yet must he be able to ride up to the pack, or he cannot know what is going on. If you never see the hounds, what difference is it whether the Belvoir hounds are before you or a scratch pack of staghounds ?

Therefore, being lovers of hunting, it is well to ask ourselves whether we are prepared to ride to hounds. We shall generally have room. Even near Melton there is often room at the top of the hunt,

but in the Grantham district there is no crowd. Yet the squires and farmers have been hard riders from their youth up. They were trained and led by such men as the late Duke of Rutland, Frank Gillard, Messrs. Hutchinson, "Banker" Hardy, Sir Thomas Whichcote, Mr. John Welby and many more heroes, past and present. There will be rivalry and some of what Brooksby happily calls "zealous" riding. If, however, you love hunting and yet cannot take your place with such as these, then surely an easier sphere is really more likely to afford enjoyment where, at less cost of nerve and horseflesh, you can see hounds at work. I say horseflesh because, with a few, very few, exceptions, no man can really enjoy himself from Grantham except on good stout well-bred horses in hard condition. But if you have the horses and can ride them, and yet hounds are still your first thought in hunting, then by all means go to Grantham and you will never regret it.

CHAPTER V

THE HUNTS AND THEIR HISTORY

Importance of the Huntsman—Increasing Difficulties of Hunting—Music and Pace of different Packs—The Quorn—Mr. Meynell—Lord Sefton—Nimrod's Comments—Mr. Osbaldeston—Tom Firr—Lord Lonsdale—Captain Burns-Hartopp—The Cottesmore—Sir William Lowther—Sir Richard Sutton—Lord Kesteven—Mr. Baird—Foundation of the Kennel—Mr. Evan Hanbury—Arthur Thatcher—Oakham as a Hunting Centre—The Belvoir—A Big Crowd—The Hunt Servants and their Horses—A Typical Day—History of The Pack—Successive Huntsmen—Belvoir Blood in Other Packs—Sir Gilbert Greenall and Capell—Brocklesby and Belvoir—Goodall and Gillard—Masters of the Belvoir—Society at the Castle—Deputy Masters—Lord Forester—Dukes of Rutland—A great County Hunt—Mr. Fernie's Hunt—The Country—The Division during Sir Richard Sutton's Mastership—Mr. Tailby—Some Hard Riders—The Billesdon—Sir Bache Cunard—Why Mr. Fernie's Fixtures are not Overcrowded—Big Studs the Exception—The Right Kind of Horse—Brooks in the Country—Notable Huntsmen trained in Mr. Fernie's Country—The Pack—The Pytchley—Mr. Naylor's Mastership—Squires, the Huntsman—Northamptonshire as a Hunting County—Mr. Meynell's Influence on Hunting—The First Earl Spencer—Dick Knight—Mr. Warde—His Horse "Solyman"—A Long Run—Lord Althorp—Later Masters—Sir Bellingham Graham—Mr. Osbaldeston—Mr. George Payne—Lord Chesterfield—"The Other Tom Smith"—Sir Francis Goodricke—A Hunting Pauper—Charles Payn—Colonel Anstruther Thomson—Conflicting Interests in a Hunting Country—Lord Spencer as Master—M. Brunetière on English Sports—Sir Herbert Langham—Whyte-Melville on the Pytchley—The Woodland Pytchley—Early Masters—The Woodlands—The Atherstone—Mr. Osbaldeston—Lord

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Vernon's Hounds—Famous Hunt Clubs—Lord Anson's Mastership—Mr. Oakley—Mr. J. C. Munro—Lord Denbigh's Coverts—Other Landowners who Support the Hunt—The Warwickshire and North Warwickshire—Character of the Country—The Shuckburgh Country—Stratford-on-Avon—The Plough Lands—Nimrod's Views—Mr. Corbet—An Old Writer on the Warwickshire Country—Will Barrow—Lord Middleton—Mr. Shirley—Mr. Vyner's Scratch Pack—Other Masters—Leamington as a Hunting Centre—Mr. Baker—Peter Collison—Hounds Crossed with Bloodhounds—Lord Willoughby de Broke.

THIS chapter will deal with the packs that hunt the various countries which are included in the general term of the "Shires." The word, though an awkward one, is commended to us by usage and by the fact that it expresses our meaning. There are other "grass" countries besides those treated of in this volume, but, though their hunting is over pasture land for the most part, they are not included in the Shires, the fixtures of which can be reached from the centres treated of in the foregoing chapters. In the following pages I shall sketch the history, organisation and methods of hunting of these packs of hounds. The history of some of the packs has been written in full or in part by those who have had access to the papers of the various masters and huntsmen, or whose personal knowledge of the country has made them authorities on the subject. My object here is only to give such a general view of the past of the hunts as may enable a visitor to understand their present position.

There is an undoubted increase of pleasure in hunting over ground which has been connected with so many famous men in the past. In the Quorn, the Belvoir, the Pytchley and Mr. Fernie's hunt there is no covert, nay there is scarcely a field or a fence

which has not some association with the story of fox-hunting and its rise as a national sport in England. I confess I can never see Glooston Wood or Shangton Holt drawn without seeming to hear, as the too impetuous field dashes away, the "Hi, Hi" of Mr. Assheton Smith uttered with all the old H' emphasis as he strove to gain time for his hounds to settle. In the lane by Glenn Gorse I seem to hear the shrill tones of the Squire (Osbaldeston) as he alternately cheered his hounds and gossiped with his friends, or darted away with three couple of leading hounds, leaving the others to come through the horses, as indeed you may sometimes see them do to-day. Or, again, with the Belvoir I hear the silky tones of Gentleman Shaw at a check, as hounds waver for a moment outside Freeby Wood or Bescaby Oaks. "Gently, gentlemen, gently. One moment, and I'll thank ye."

Or, to come nearer to our own time, Tom Firr's deep note sounds in our ears, as his hounds put down their heads after being lifted clear of a too eager field, or the eager "Huic, Huic, Huic" of Will Goodall the younger as he cheered his hounds together. The dark fences before you in the Harborough country are those that Mr. Smith said could all be crossed "with a fall," and the hedges clean and fair of the best of the Quorn those that Lord Wilton sailed over, never finding "those big places they talk of," because to a consummate horseman with an eye for country and the best of cattle even Leicestershire loses its terrors.

In looking back over the history of the past, certain points seem common to all the hunts in all periods of their history. The first of these is the importance of the huntsman to the sport. Say what we will

about this, one fact stands out clearly, that when these packs have had a first-rate man to hunt them the average of sport has been good, and when ordinary knowledge and skill carried the horn there has been plenty of fun, but when the huntsman has not had the requisite qualities there has been comparative failure. I say comparative, because in grass countries—and more rarely in the provinces—are days when hounds cannot but run, so strong is the scent, at all events until they lose the scent because they are blown.

As time has gone on and the conditions of hunting have changed, the huntsman has become still more important to the sport. The difficulties in the way of hunting and killing a fox are always increasing, and a huntsman cannot continue to show good sport without killing a fair proportion of the foxes he hunts. It has been said that the huntsman matters little, for, with a scent, any one can kill foxes, and without no one can. This, however, is not true. Though a moderate man can hunt a fox with a scent, he often cannot kill him. There is no moment in the chase when the coolness, judgment and woodcraft of a huntsman are more tested than when he has a sinking fox and *therefore* a failing scent before his hounds. Hounds know when a fox is dying and they work hard to catch him, but if then an untimely halloo get their heads up, they will not again pick up the thread of the chase which has been thoughtlessly snapped.

Take the following instance. There had been a long run, and the fox had lain down in a field of turnips. As the huntsman and hounds came into the field, the fox jumped up in view. Now, only about half the field was under turnips, the rest was

—I forget what ; but at all events it was open ground. The huntsman viewed the fox. Off went his cap, a shrill cheer broke from his lips, and the hounds coursed the fox to the hedge. He turned short the other side and ran up to the right, while the excited pack flashed half across the next field. The fox escaped, the thread was broken, and the hounds could only feel after the line, till at last it faded out altogether. That huntsman had found his fox well and hunted him fairly, but he could not kill him. If he had held his tongue, hounds would have had the fox in the hedgerow. We forget how much nearer the ground than ours the hound's eyes are, and consequently how much more limited his field of vision is. It is always safer to let the hounds run their fox into view themselves.

Hunting a fox is a much more difficult task in the grass countries than it was fifty or sixty years ago. There always were, it is true, stains of sheep and cattle over the line, and there always was in Leicestershire and Northamptonshire a too eager crowd. But there were no railways nor so many fences, and cattle were not left out so late. There are more herds and flocks in a given area now, when the crowds of followers are bigger and more men ride up to hounds than was formerly the case. Shepherd's dogs are more common, and are perhaps more often used by those who, with no objection to hunting in the abstract, would prefer that the fox should take his course over some one else's fields rather than their own. "Can't you keep your dog in?" "Garn, what are you talking about? my dog have as much right to run him as youn have!" is a true story and an attitude of mind not unknown to us. Un-sportsmanlike if you please, but it exists. Then

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there are more foxes now, and changes are more common, and hounds that change often and are cheered from one scent to another will naturally take the fresher, more fragrant line of the newly found fox in preference to the line of the hunted one.

All these difficulties have gone on increasing, but we have always found huntsmen equal to the task. Naturally, the ablest men are drawn to Leicestershire, and their presence and skill have in their turn helped to increase the fame of the countries. One advantage the modern huntsman has, or may have if he will. He has certainly a better instrument in his hounds than had his predecessors. The modern pack of hounds in Leicestershire includes few bad ones. I do not know, indeed, whether individual hounds are better than they were, but I think that the average excellence of packs of hounds is steadily growing. There will, of course, always be hounds of special gifts that will stand out from the others, but all are up to a certain standard of make and shape. All have shoulders and loins; few indeed are crooked or flat sided; all can stay, and if a special failing is noted, it is corrected. The modern fox-hound with bone and stamina is, for example, growing more musical, silence being a mark of a certain want of strength and constitution. "Oh, sir," exclaimed a Eurasian lady to an Indian M. F. H., "how *do* you make your dogs to run and bark so?" Now hounds "run and bark," because they are sound. Gillard, the best hound-breeder of our day, restored the music to the Belvoir at the same time that he increased their bone and stamina. The Cottesmore bitches could always sing as they went, and Mr. Wroughton left behind with the Pytchley a lady pack which can leave the horses when there is a scent and yet dis-

course ravishing melody. The modern fox-hound can hunt and race, and with a man who can handle the instrument as our great huntsmen in the Shires have done, sport must needs be good in spite of difficulties.

The instrument with which the modern huntsman has to work is therefore a fine one and is improving. But in the conditions of sport in the grass countries the best pack of hounds in the world cannot show sport by themselves. The mistake often made in this connection is that, having bred a wonderfully perfect animal, we do not sufficiently recognise the limits of his powers. In the old state of things when there were no railways, fewer hedgerows—it is wonderful that foxes resist the temptation to run up and down these as much as they do—not nearly so many foxes, and undrained land, it was possible for hounds, if left alone, to hunt a fox to death. This is much more difficult now, and consequently the importance to sport of the huntsman has increased. The best huntsman is the man who can obtain from his hounds the utmost amount of work, who can leave them to themselves, but who knows their limits; can see when they have come to the end of their resources and, without delay or hesitation, come to their assistance. Such a huntsman was Tom Firr; such too was William Goodall, Jr.; and their success was great, although neither of them had a remarkably excellent pack of hounds to work with.

With a huntsman of the highest rank, however, this is to a certain extent compensated by the trust which his hounds repose in him, the quickness with which the pack flies to the horn, and the ready and willing obedience which they give to his voice when he cheers or restrains them. That the huntsman



THE QUORN HUNT

should recognise the limits of his hounds' powers and come to their assistance is necessary, and in the Midlands it is also needful that he should understand the conditions imposed upon him by the numbers of people who hunt. Some huntsmen are bewildered by the crowd, and excellent men have therefore failed entirely in the Shires.

The criticisms often inspired by ignorance are also continual and trying, but must be borne with. Moreover, if the huntsman will reflect, there is truth in some of the grumbling. He has, it may be, shown an excellent hunting run. Yet the followers are not pleased. Why? Because with such a crowd no one has been able to see it. The huntsman in the Shires then must always be striving for a quick start, the whole secret of sport lying in the work of the first ten minutes, which shakes the crowd into their places and disperses them widely. Time, like money, is best made by small economies; and the huntsman, though never in a hurry, must never lose an instant. Every second is of importance to him for the double purpose of pressing his fox and getting clear of the crush behind. Thus, not to dwell longer on a subject which would lead me too far, we may say that the history of fox-hunting in the Shires is epitomised in the story of the huntsmen who have handled the horn.

I. THE QUORN.

The first pack to be dealt with is the *Quorn*. It matters little whether or not this is the most ancient pack, for modern hunting dates from Mr. Meynell, and he was master of the Quorn from 1753 to 1800.

He bought Quorndon Hall and built the kennels, and to him the hunt owes its name as well as its reputation. In all history there must be a starting-point, and Mr. Meynell's mastership has been fixed upon as the beginning of modern hunting. It might be said, of course, that Lord Spencer and Dick Knight handled their hounds in much the same fashion in Northamptonshire about that period. No doubt they did, and no doubt wherever there was a young eager master and huntsman and good scenting ground the "Meynellian" system was more or less followed.

Mr. Meynell's character and position, however, gave a name to a system. He was in every respect a remarkable man, and seems to have made a great impression on his own generation. He made the Quorn famous, drew men to the country, and indirectly founded the prosperity of Melton Mowbray, for it was the fame of his hounds that drew Mr. Cecil Forester and other hard-riding sportsmen thither. Nothing, however, shows the change in hunting even in Mr. Meynell's time and our own more than the difference between the extent of country drawn. Mr. Meynell hunted from Nottingham to Market Harborough. It was not merely that he began, or rather caused Jack Raven to begin—for Mr. Meynell never hunted the hounds himself—a quick style of hunting, but that he paid more attention to the all-important subject of condition. This attracted the attention of his contemporaries, as witness the couplet from the Billesdon Coplow verses :

"But for horses and hounds and the *system of kennel*,
Give me Leicestershire nags and the hounds of old Meynell."

The faster hounds stimulated the eager riders, and these in turn reacted on the huntsmen. Lord Sefton,

who succeeded Mr. Meynell in 1800, reaped where the latter had sown, and, with Jack Raven and Stephen Goodall as huntsmen, showed great sport. By the time Lord Sefton became master the country had already altered from the earlier wild, unenclosed country, and the foxes too were stout. The ox-fences and bullfinches now made their appearance, and artificial coverts were plentiful. As the fences taxed the horses more, second horses were introduced. The distances covered by the hounds were much greater in Mr. Meynell's day than they are now, and while the country was still open, it was much if a man could tell where he would dine and sleep when he started in the morning.

In Lord Sefton's time—and the same may be said of the two seasons of his successor, Lord Foley—the pace increased, the runs were more often circular, and foxes began to run from one to another of the small coverts. As much time as formerly might indeed be occupied in the chase, but the point between start and finish was much shorter. Then came Mr. Assheton Smith, whose fame as a horseman has somewhat eclipsed his reputation as a huntsman. But he was always with his hounds. No fence stopped him in the chase or hindered him from making a cast. Wide and bold casts were the characteristics of his handling of the pack, and the same system was followed by Mr. Osbaldeston. "Nimrod" comments on the way these two great masters of the sport hunted a fox, and his words are as true to-day as they were a hundred years ago. "Quickness of decision is the life and soul of fox-hunting. A fox instantly recovered is worth recovering in Leicestershire with two hundred men in the field. The stumbling upon him by the time he has got two miles ahead of the pack is only

productive of mischief. Hounds are ridden over—pressed upon they are sure to be—confusion arises, and as a fresh fox is at hand that is the cure for the disappointment. . . . ‘D—d unlucky losing that first fox. Very pretty whilst it lasted. The Squire’s cast no doubt was right, but depend upon it he was headed by that shepherd and his dog.’ ‘But why did he not try back?’ asks one of the old school (note, reader, this was the first quarter of the last century, and the *old* school is with us still!). ‘Not used to so fast a country. I think, by the crows, he’s gone over yonder hill.’ ‘Very likely, sir,’ says Jack Stevens, as he holds a gate open for the hounds who are on their road to Shangton Holt, where they are sure of a find in ten minutes.” All this might have been written to-day.

Mr. Osbaldeston greatly improved the pack, and he bred for pace. He entered, though he did not breed, the famous Furrier, to whom most of our best hounds strain back. Mr. Osbaldeston also taught his hounds to disregard the pressure of horsemen. This was done by going away with the first lot of hounds and leaving the others to be cheered forward by the whipper-in. A fox-hound hates to be left behind, and will strive to get forward in spite of horses and the perils of a crowd. It would be outside my plan to detail the history of the pack. It is enough to say that the example set by these earlier huntsmen was followed by those who succeeded with more or less success according to their ability, until we arrive at the present day.

Of all the huntsmen in the field who ever carried the horn in Leicestershire the late Tom Firr was the greatest. He knew exactly what his hounds could do in the circumstances of the hunt. He never lost

his head, and as a rule kept clear of the crowd, which certainly was increased by his fame. He never seemed to be riding desperately, but was always with his hounds; yet, being the fine horseman he was, he must often have run risks and taken chances, as his occasional severe falls show. But the fact that he hunted hounds over Leicestershire for twenty-six seasons, and without any diminution of nerve or success, shows his marvellous ability. He had to make his own pack, for the Craven hounds, which were bought when Mr. Masters took his famous hounds into the South Notts country, were hardly at first suited to the Quorn. Never I think at any time had he such hounds to hunt as fell to the lot of his contemporaries of the Belvoir and the Cottesmore. In one circumstance he was fortunate, for early in his career some stout Scotch foxes were distributed through the country, and for many seasons they and their descendants gave great sport.

I should say perhaps that his best time was in the early 'seventies. It was not till nearly twenty years later that I saw him, Lord Lonsdale then being master. No master ever was more successful in keeping an eager field off the hounds' backs than Lord Lonsdale, who was himself a practical huntsman. But, on the whole, the time which men will look back to is that when Mr. Coupland and Tom Firr worked together in Leicestershire, and Brooksby recorded their doings with all Nimrod's humorous spirit and grace and with something more than Nimrod's modesty.

Of the Quorn country I have already written, and what it was in the past it still is to-day. The present master, who is the twenty-fourth in succession, is Captain Burns-Hartopp, with Tom Bishopp, late of

the Grafton, for his huntsman. The Quorn for two or three days in the week is on the best grass, and for other two in an excellent wild country. If you go to Melton, you will join the hunt and take a pride alike in its present glories and its past achievements ; and many a pleasant hour may be spent in turning over the records of the past. Thus we add to the pleasures of hunting over a beautiful country the charms of historic associations with the past of the sport we love.

II. THE COTTESMORE

The Quorn has been a subscription pack for the greater part of its history, but the *Cottesmore* owes its existence and its fame to-day to two families, those of Noel and Lowther. It is a very ancient hunt, and no one will be surprised at this when he becomes acquainted with the country, for it would be difficult to find a district more suitable for hunting. It is an extensive country and almost as various as the Belvoir. Like most other masters of his time, Mr. Noel began by hunting over a large and undefined country which, as time went on and foxes became more numerous, was gradually reduced to its present limits. At one time, in the middle of the eighteenth century, part of the present Cottesmore and a portion of the Belvoir were hunted by a sort of joint-stock company, consisting of the Duke of Rutland and Lords Cardigan, Gainsborough, Gower and Howe.

But the true founder of the Cottesmore Hunt was Sir William Lowther, afterwards the first Lord Lonsdale. He lived at Uffington and at Stocken, after-



From a photograph by R. B. Lodge, Enfield

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wards so well known as the abode of General Grosvenor, a keen sportsman, a cheery companion, but not a bold rider. For nearly fifty years Lord Lonsdale hunted the Cottesmore, and he had kept harriers before that. The hunting was quite in the old style, and foxes were walked to death by a steady pack of big hounds, much to the disgust of the Meltonians who came out. The huntsman bore the not inappropriate name of Slacke. Before the death of Lord Lonsdale, his second son, who succeeded him in the title, took the management, and is said to have learned a great deal from both the Quorn and the Belvoir, which were in style of hunting and kennel management many years ahead of the Cottesmore. It was in Colonel Lowther's time (1870-1876), with Lambert as huntsman, that the Melton people began to perceive the possibilities of the Cottesmore country. Lambert was a quick intelligent man, and gave life to the pack which had plenty of hunting power. The quickest and best bred hounds will become slow with a slow man, and it is wonderful what pace a lively huntsman can raise even with a pack of Bassett hounds. The fox-hound has drive, but he soon loses it if he is not kept up to the mark.

In 1842 the first Lord Lonsdale gave up the hounds, and Sir Richard Sutton succeeded, taking over the old pack and the same huntsman. We may pass lightly over the following years after the old pack had been sold. Sir Richard Sutton, who had built up an excellent pack on Belvoir lines, with old Goosey as kennel huntsman, took his hounds to Quorndon in 1847. Then came Mr. Henley Greaves and Mr. Borrowes. In his third season Sir John Trollope, afterwards Lord Kesteven, began to form the pack, which was the foundation of the existing

one. This was in 1857, so that the present Cottesmore pack have been nearly fifty years in the country.

Lord Kesteven was an excellent judge of a hound, and when Mr. Baird (1880-1900) began his mastership of twenty years, he found an excellent pack, though the standard of the dog pack was afterwards reduced. The real foundation of the kennel was a lucky union between Lord Fitzhardinge's Termagant, that came to the Cottesmore in a draft, and the Belvoir Lexicon. There is also a considerable strain of Lord Henry Bentinck's blood in the kennel, and another hit was made in Seaman, who combined Belvoir and Grove blood. On the whole, the Cottesmore pack is full of Belvoir blood, and that handsome hound, Stainless, has transmitted his looks to them. Mr. Baird was fortunate in his huntsmen, and when admiring the beautiful pack of to-day, we must not forget the excellent work done by Mr. Baird's huntsmen, Neal and Gillson, who were both men of sound judgment in kennel matters.

When Mr. Evan Hanbury succeeded, he found the pack famous and its record of sport second to none, and in the two seasons he has been there it is well known that the sport has been something remarkable. Arthur Thatcher, the present huntsman, who was born at Brocklesby and has been with hounds all his life, is deservedly appreciated by all who have hunted with him, and is one of the soundest, as well as most brilliant, of the younger huntsmen of the day.

If I were given my choice of a place to live in and a pack to hunt with, I would say, let me live near Oakham and hunt with the Cottesmore every day they are out. The country is wilder and, if I may say so, less artificial than some other parts of the grass countries, and in consequence the foxes are stouter

and wilder, and for that reason possibly leave a better scent.

Doubtless other packs can show bursts as brilliant for the satisfying daily bread of hunting, but for runs that are long but not tedious, for chases that are hunts but not slow, the Cottesmore, like its neighbour the Belvoir, is the country.

For more than a quarter of a century now this hunt has been thoroughly worked and well hunted, and the tide of fashion has flowed towards it. It is a hunt to settle in and to take a pride in. But still, for the casual visitor, the man of two or three seasons in the Shires, I hold to Melton and the Quorn. When you come to the Shires you want to have not only the best of hunting but the best of country; and, with the exception of part of the Tuesday and Saturday countries, I may say plainly the Cottesmore is not as a riding ground equal to the Quorn or Mr. Fernie's. There are parts, too, of the Tuesday, or Leicestershire, country that are very rough; and Tilton, Loddington, Tugby, Skeffington and Launde are places where none should venture unless he has a stout horse. The present pack is one of the most successful instances of judicious introduction of Belvoir blood.

III. THE BELVOIR

The first day that we hunt with the *Belvoir* will always remain in our memory, so associated is the pack with the history of fox-hunting and the fox-hound. So many men in the past have looked on this hunt as the very embodiment and type of the best side of our national sport that we feel that a day with

the Belvoir is an experience not easily to be forgotten. Suppose then that some Wednesday early in the season we find ourselves at Croxton Park. The day is cloudy, and the wind has a touch of east in it. The remains of the old fishing lodge of the Duke of Rutland are before us, and the pond's steely grey in the subdued misty light of the November morning adds a beauty to the landscape. There is a gathering of all the hardest riders, soldiers, statesmen, men of business, lawyers and farmers, people of every degree of rank and wealth. Then the women are on the best horses that money can buy or judgment select; others are riding less high-bred, but still useful animals; and there are many on foot and quite a cloud of cyclists.

There, too, quietly being walked up and down is the famous pack, all with a wonderful family likeness in shape and colouring. Clean and bright in their coats, they have the easy grace and motion of perfect shape. Marvellous examples of careful selection they are, combining strength and speed that can tire out and outstrip the best of horses. The Hunt servants are neatly got up in quiet and workmanlike manner, and are mounted on horses chosen by one of the best judges in England. A trifle high in flesh for hunt horses perhaps; but when you have said that, you have said all that the keenest critic can find to object to. Every one is full of hope and expectation, for the whole season is before them with its possibilities of glorious moments, the like of which can be enjoyed only in the hunting-field. The huntsman possibly feels a little anxious, for the whole throng depend on him for their sport; and, as he is judged strictly by results, a bad scenting day, for which he is in no way responsible, may nevertheless

lower his reputation. But, after all, he is not much to be pitied, for his work is his pleasure, and he knows as no one else does what those eighteen or twenty couple of hounds can do.

The Master has his cares, for the very popularity of the hunt fills his mind with a continual dread lest some of those reckless youths should take as little thought for his hounds as they do for their own necks. He looks at his watch and nods to the huntsman, who moves quietly off, the pack clustering round his horse and then trotting on in their eagerness as far in front as their respect for the first whipper-in, who leads the way and represents order and discipline, will allow. They know what is before them, and their waving sterns flash white in the anticipation of coming pleasure that fills them.

Bescaby Oaks is the first covert to be drawn. The field follow till they are packed in a muddy green lane where they can do little mischief and whence many of them will find it hard to disentangle themselves. But we have edged as near the gate on the right as may be. The leaves are still on the trees, golden, scarlet and brown, and there is that indescribable scent of hunting in the air that stirs us with the associations of past pleasures of the chase. There is a cheer from the huntsman, a crack of the thong of a whipper-in, then a note from a hound which silences the chatter in the lane and brings every one to attention. Then arises a tumult of hound voices which sinks into silence and swells out again. The clamour divides and tells us there are two lines, and then a shrill voice sounds from the far side of the covert. Those nearest the gate dash through, up one side and down to the left, half the horses out of hand with excitement; but there is

no time to lose, for the fox is away, and the Belvoir hounds are already striving forward. With inconceivable rapidity they flit through the undergrowth, and, by the time the first men are through the gate and out of the covert, the whole pack has tumbled out of the wood spread wide for the scent, hit off the line, and are streaming away with a rippling, chiming cry that tells of a scent.

Now, catch hold of the horse by the head and send him along, for, even though he has the best blood of the Stud book in his veins, hounds will beat him for pace. Sit back and let him have plenty of rein at the first hairy fence, for there is probably a ditch as well to clear and, as he flings the first two fences behind him, there will be more room. The mass of the field are hindering each other at the gate or making for a gap, heedless of the fact that with a good horse the safest and happiest place is in front. But it is the hounds we have come out to see, and the horse is but the means to an end. See they have overrun the line. The fox, only a cub, feels the pace already and turns short down a hedgerow. The hounds never pause or waver but cast themselves widely and freely to the left, then to the right, and, with scarcely the loss of a moment, are going as fast as ever. But the pace steadies them, and there is a bit of bad scenting ground where they have to feel for the scent; yet, even though they are hunting closely, they still drive forward, never wasting a moment. There is no dwelling to rejoice over the scent, and though they are not able to race, we shall have to look to it that we do not lose them. The eager puppies and two impetuous leaders are off the line now and again, but the hounds in the middle never lose the scent and recall the others

by a timely note. But in this small square covert of thorns the fox, being young and inexperienced, has waited, and that pause has sealed his fate, for this time hounds and fox come out almost together, and it is a race for life for the fox and a steeplechase for the followers for the next two miles till the hounds fairly run into him in the open. A Belvoir burst of twenty minutes of the best! So the day, with perhaps another burst, or it may be a long steady hunt, goes on. If you stay to the end, when the hounds turn away for the kennels at the end of the day, you will see that they will trot off as gaily as they started in the morning. The Master, the servants, and the much diminished field will have tired out two horses apiece, but courage and condition will apparently leave the hounds as willing and able to hunt when the shadows of the short November twilight put a stop to the sport as when they left their kennels in the morning.

Now, this pack that you have watched and followed with so much interest and pleasure, is the result of at least a hundred years of selection, judgment and thought. There are fifty or sixty couples in kennels and as many puppies are sent out to walk, of whom not a third will be found worthy of a trial in the pack and fewer still of a permanent place on the hound list. The first definite knowledge we have of the Belvoir hounds is in 1727, in the days of the third Duke of Rutland. His son, the famous Marquis of Granby, spent some of the time he could spare from "the wars" in hunting, and we know that he improved the pack. The fourth Duke married a Somerset, the beautiful Lady Mary Isabella, whose portrait by Sir Joshua hangs on the walls at Badminton, and from Badminton came two hounds,

Champion and Topper, to which many of the famous hounds of Brocklesby and Belvoir can be traced back, through Songstress.

From 1791 the pack has been hunted by a succession of able huntsmen who remained long at their posts, Newman, Shaw, Goosey, Goodall, Cooper, Gillard and Capell having each hunted the pack in turn from 1791 to 1903. Goosey laid the foundation of the pack, Goodall brought in the famous Rallywood, and Gillard carried the work to perfection. There is scarcely a pack in England which has not Belvoir blood, and the most noted of these hounds can trace their pedigree back through Weathergage to Rallywood, and so back to the famous Furrier that was drafted from Belvoir to the Quorn in Mr. Osbaldeston's time, but whose descendant, Rallywood, a gift from Brocklesby, brought the Furrier blood back into its natal kennel, to the lasting benefit of the English fox-hound. The result of this good work of the past is that the present Master, Sir Gilbert Greenall, and his huntsman, Capell, will show you sport to-day with the finest pack of hounds which ever hunted a fox.

The Brocklesby and the Belvoir hounds are to all intents of the same race nowadays. They have had the advantage of being kept by two great families, the Pelhams and the Mannors, for a hundred and fifty years or more. Our interest in the antiquity of hunting may tempt us to trace the existence of hounds kept for hunting back into a dim past, but the real origin of the modern fox-hound, as he exists to-day in the most famous kennels, may be traced to two men, Will Smith of the Brocklesby and Goosey of the Belvoir. These two men took the material that existed; they bred to a type, and made that

type permanent in their kennels. They were enabled to do this because, being the servants of great noblemen with wide estates, they could send out many scores of puppies to walk and thus had a large field for choice. Other men, who came afterwards, improved the hounds. Goodall gave the Belvoir dash, and Gillard increased the music and the stamina; but old Goosey and W. Smith, the Brocklesby huntsman, it was who fixed the type to which all modern fox-hounds are bred to-day. Luckily for us and fox-hunting, these men lived before the days when a boy's gifts and abilities were liable to be dissipated by what is called education. They gave minds undistracted by irrelevant acquirements to the task of their lives and achieved success in proportion.

The Masters of the Belvoir hounds have been not less notable men than the huntsmen. The active Masters in the field have not always been the Dukes themselves, for from the death of the soldier Marquis of Granby to the time when the sixth Duke took over the pack from Lord Forester, by far the greater part of the time the hounds were managed by relatives or friends. The fourth Duke was a statesman and the friend of Pitt; the fifth, though he was proud of the pack, only regarded the hounds as one of the lesser interests of a busy life, for this Duke and his Duchess were by gifts and tastes leaders of society. The visitors to Belvoir during their reign comprised every one of note, and thus no doubt helped to make the town of Melton fashionable and hunting popular; but the fifth Duke was not, like his son and successor, a keen sportsman. The best of Melton society was always to be found at the castle, and Beau Brummell and Mr. Assheton Smith and Sir Francis Grant, sportsman, man of fashion and P.R.A., Berkeley

Craven and Lord Alvanley were visitors and followers of the pack. Yet, on the whole, it may be said that the hunt was supported as much for the benefit of the neighbourhood as for the pleasure of its owners.

In the history of the Belvoir, then, we shall notice that there were a number of deputy Masters. Sir Carnaby Haggerstone, Lord George Cavendish and Mr. Thomas Thoroton managed the hounds during the absence of the fourth Duke in Ireland and after his death in 1787, until, in 1791, Mr. Perceval took the entire control. The pack hunted two days a week, and the yearly cost, as shown by a balance-sheet still in the possession of the Duke of Rutland, amounted to £775, 10s. In 1799 the fifth Duke of Rutland took over the mastership, which in 1830 he handed over to Lord Forester, the successor of Mr. Meynell's Cecil Forester. Lord Forester gave up the hounds in 1857, and thus out of eighty-four years for no less than forty-two the hounds were managed by Masters who were not of the Manners family.

When we hunt with the Belvoir, we must not forget that a great debt of gratitude is due to the memory of Lord Forester. His judgment it was that selected Will Goodall, when only a second whipper-in, for the post of huntsman in succession to old Goosey. Lord Forester supported and encouraged Goodall in his efforts to improve the pack, so that it should not merely be first-rate at work, but both in this respect and in make, shape and quality should surpass all others. Lord Forester and Goodall had excellent material to work on, for "two such judges as Mr. Lambton and Sir Richard Sutton had declared that they always felt discontented with their own hounds after a visit to Belvoir. The aim of Goodall was to preserve the rare quality of the

pack, but to reduce the standard and increase the bone."

But on the story of this hunt I will not dwell further, for it was my pleasure and privilege to write the history of the Belvoir Hunt, and in that volume I have gathered together all that I was able of the history of the pack. Besides, the present book deals with the past only in its bearing on the present. But the Belvoir sport and the Belvoir pack are now what they have always been. It has been the congenial task of the present Master, Sir Gilbert Greenall, and his huntsman, Ben Capell, to carry on the pack in a manner worthy of its great traditions. It was no easy task for the one to succeed Masters so popular and respected as the Duke of Rutland and his son the late Lord Edward Manners, or for Capell to follow a huntsman whose skill in the science of hunting was only surpassed by his tact and judgment in the kennel. Frank Gillard completed the work of his predecessors, and when he left Belvoir he left a pack which could hardly be improved upon. To have bred such hounds as Stainless, Weathergage, Gambler, Dexter, and others less well known but almost equally good, was to establish a name as a breeder that will not soon be eclipsed.

The Belvoir Hunt, then, and the Belvoir kennel flourish as of old. The good hunt horses are worthy of the hounds, for no servants are better mounted than Capell and his whippers-in, and as for the sport, it was only a week ago as I write that the Belvoir hounds ran from Buckminster to Woodwell Head and so round to Stapleford, repeating and indeed improving on a famous hunt of some seven years back. Now, as of old, the Belvoir hounds offer sport varied, brilliant and satisfactory, and draw the best

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of Melton to the covert side when hunting in their Leicestershire country. Of the Lincolnshire side of the Belvoir I have already written when describing the sport open to visitors from Grantham.

In speaking of this hunt, then, it must not be forgotten that it still is a great county hunt, affording sport to the squires and farmers of the district, the fathers and forefathers of many of whom have supported the hunt, preserved foxes and ridden after the hounds for as long a time as the Manners family have kept the pack. Times have altered in the Belvoir country as elsewhere, and it is now a subscription hunt. Still, owing to the unrivalled pack which the Duke of Rutland lends freely to the country, and to the kennels and many splendid coverts provided by him, the connection between the hunt and Belvoir Castle is in no way severed, the present Duke being not less interested than his predecessors in the fame of the hounds which still depend upon his support and influence in so many ways.

IV. MR. FERNIE'S HUNT

From the hunts round Melton we pass to those for which Market Harborough is the centre, and the chief of these is the Billesdon Hunt, better known to its members and to the world generally as *Mr. Fernie's*. This hunt was formed out of the southern portion of the Quorn, and in old books, before the division, it is always described as the Harborough country, and was by many people considered the cream of the Quorn Hunt. Mr. Meynell stayed at Langton Hall, and the hounds were kennelled at Great Bowden



VIEW FROM JOHN BALL



A CUT AND LAID FENCE IN HIGH LEICESTERSHIRE.

Inn when this part of the Quorn country was to be hunted. In his time there were not a great many foxes, and most of the coverts which we draw to-day were not planted.

The country was more open than now, and it is said that from Glooston Wood to Skeffington there was no covert and scarcely a tree. But by the time Mr. Assheton Smith was Master of the Quorn (1806-17), enclosures, draining and the planting of artificial coverts had gone on apace and the country was already much in favour with the hard riders. We have seen how Mr. Vickerman looked on it as the best part of Leicestershire when he visited Melton. Yet the hilly nature of the ground and the severity of its fences caused many Meltonians then, as now, to avoid it and to seek their Thursday's sport in the Market Overton district of the Cottesmore Hunt. But Mr. Smith and Mr. Osbaldeston both liked it, and the names of its historic coverts recur often in the pages of the *Sporting Magazine*. One disadvantage this part of the Quorn always laboured under, in that it was a long way from Melton and it was necessary for hounds and servants to lie out the night before hunting, on account of the distance from the headquarters of the hunt at Quorn.

It was in Sir Richard Sutton's mastership that the division first began. Mr. Richard Sutton (1885) hunted the country from Billesdon, where he built kennels, and to this day the members of the hunt have B.H. on their buttons. In the days of Lord Stamford the division became definite, and ever since the time when Mr. Tailby first became master (1856) the Billesdon Hunt has been practically a separate institution. There was an idea of reuniting to the Quorn when Mr. Tailby resigned in 1878, and it was

understood that Mr. Coupland, at that time Master of the Quorn, desired to reclaim the Harborough country. But landowners, farmers and subscribers had tasted the advantages of autonomy and were in no way inclined to agree to reunion. The good town of Market Harborough, which, during Mr. Tailby's mastership, rivalled Melton itself, threw all its influence into the scale for separation, and the Billesdon is now as firmly established in the loyalty of its members as any hunt in England.

Since the days of Mr. Tailby the limits of the country have been much narrowed and reduced. It so happened that the beginning of Mr. Tailby's mastership coincided with the resignation by Lord Lonsdale of the mastership of the Cottesmore, and Sir John Trollope (1855), who had stepped into the breach with a view of keeping that hunt going, was unable to undertake so wide an extent of country. Mr. Tailby therefore received the loan of the Leicestershire woodlands of the Cottesmore and some of the choicest coverts of that hunt, having the right to draw the Punch Bowl, Ranksborough and other places in the old and present Cottesmore country. Thus for many seasons Mr. Tailby hunted the best four-day-a-week country that has ever been known. It is a matter of common knowledge that he showed extraordinary sport and the Tailby Thursdays were famous. Quarters at Market Harborough went to a premium. All the hardest riding men flocked to the country.

Such were Mr. J. H. Douglass, still the secretary of the hunt and one of the best of the heavy weights, the Messrs. Murrietta, who were pioneers of polo, the Goslings, who lived at Harborough, Mr. Alan Pennington, who has for many years now hunted with the Quorn, "Timber" Powell, so called from his liking

for that kind of fence, the late Lord Hopetoun, who lived at Papillon's Hall, Captain Whitmore, of Gumley Hall, whose team of greys was a feature of the coaching meets at The Magazine in Hyde Park in bygone days, Major Bethune of Burton Overy, Colonel Baillie of Illston, Mr. Hay of Great Bowden, and last but not least, Mr. Tailby of Skeffington, a very hard man, who still rides to hounds and can take a fence and risk a fall with many a younger man. He set the example of riding hard, and they still show the gate which he attempted, took a severe fall, picked himself up and went on after his hounds. Shortly afterwards the hounds ran back over the same line when the Master on the same horse charged the same gate as gaily as before and this time cleared it without a fall, as he deserved to do.

The same cheery friendly spirit which marked the hunt in those days prevails still, and the Billesdon remains a hunt neither spoilt by wealth nor corrupted by fashion. Nowhere indeed so much as here does the gallant old Leicestershire spirit survive. There were fewer ladies hunting then than now, but still this hunt has never failed to attract those who loved to be with hounds when they run, such as Mrs. Arthur of Desborough, the late Mrs. Douglass and others who, being still with us, shall not be named here, but who are quite as keen, as gallant, and as brave as those who went before them. The time, however, of which I have spoken was too good to last, and when the late Lord Lonsdale took the mastership of the Cottesmore he not unnaturally reclaimed this attractive side of his country, which had the effect not only of curtailing the Billesdon country but deprived the hunt of practically all its woodlands. For a time Mr. Tailby hunted the reduced country two days a week, but in 1878 he

resigned after a mastership which will be remembered as long as hunting continues in the Midlands.

Then came Sir Bache Cunard of Nevill Holt, and his mastership marks an important era in the history of the hunt, for from his first year practically dates its existence as a separate and independent body. Sir Bache Cunard hunted two days a week, with an occasional bye. This brings us to the reign of the present Master, Mr. Fernie, and since he took the country the sport has been better and the wire less than before. In nine years of mastership Mr. Fernie has received an increasing support from farmers and landowners, and many people have settled within the limits of the hunt for the sake of the hunting and to share the privilege of riding over the best grass country in England. The whole district has benefited in consequence. The smallest villages have their tenants for the hunting season, and Market Harborough has, as we have seen, visitors who return there every year. But the surest sign of the prosperity of the hunt is to be found in the preservation of foxes, and there can be no better instance of the growth of good feeling in this respect than the history of this small piece of country, but twenty miles by fifteen miles in extent. In 1800 it was hunted for only a part of the season; later on, it had one day a week, and Mr. Tailby found it hardly sufficient for two days; and now it is hunted seven days a fortnight, with very frequent bye-days, and such a thing as a blank day is unknown. The whole of the old undivided Quorn country, from the borders of Nottinghamshire to the boundary of Northants, supplied foxes for four or five days in a week; now hounds are often advertised for nine places within the same limits during each week from November to April.

In spite of its advantages, however, Mr. Fernie's fixtures are not overcrowded, for the truth is that to ride to hounds fairly straight is beyond the power of all save a few. Those who would do so must have nerve unshaken and big bold blood horses, for the fences are serious obstacles, and it might well happen that during a run many, possibly most, of the fences will be such that they can just be jumped and no more. This is not only a test of nerve in the rider but of staying power in the horse, since big fences take more out of them than galloping. Inasmuch, then, as the reason for choosing such a country is that you wish to ride hard (for, as I have previously pointed out, if you do not desire this there are other countries than Leicestershire which would suit you better), two horses a day are a necessity or you must make up your mind to forego a great deal of the best sport. There are seasons (1901-2 was one) during which hounds will often run better in the evening than in the morning, and it is certain that there are many days in each season when they will do so. But before these afternoon runs begin the man with one horse ought to be well on his way home.

There is, however, one consideration on the other side of the account. I know no country where horses come again so quickly as they do here, and I think the percentage of injuries to horses is small. They are always galloping on sound turf which, if sometimes hard, is nearly always springy and elastic. Thus, the strains which happen in deep and sticky ground are avoided. I think, too, that while it is always a luxury to have a horse a stone over one's riding weight, yet that a lighter horse can be more safely ridden in this country than elsewhere. Horses come out more often, and if two horses a day are provided, there is

no reason why they should not, if sound and fairly stout in constitution, be hunted twice in the week. Indeed, condition is so important a matter in these grass countries that if a horse is able to come out often he will be all the better and pleasanter to ride. Speaking of the hard work done by the hunt horses in his earlier days, Frank Gillard says, "It is astonishing what a well-bred one can do, and we liked it better" (*i.e.* riding horses in hard work) "than did Lord Henry Bentinck's servants who were over-horsed."

It is well perhaps for men of moderate means who may be contemplating a season on the grass to be reminded that the big studs we read of are the exception, since wealthy men are comparatively few. Indeed, even rich men do not only spend their money on horse flesh. Probably from four to six horses and a hack is the average number in most stables. If, once more, I may refer to "Market Harborough," we shall find that Mr. Sawyer saw much sport with four and a horse of all work. But to enjoy hunting in Mr. Fernie's country a man must, as I have said, come prepared to ride and he cannot be too well mounted. The country is undulating, with ascents often steep; therefore a horse must be stout; he must have good shoulders to gallop down hill; he must go fast or he will be left behind or become so blown that he will fall; he must be fairly handy and temperate, because there are times when the rider will have to open gates or take his turn at a gap. Then the horse should be a bold clean fencer, able to crash through a thick hedge, to clear a stout top binder, to gallop over his fences at a fair pace or to pull back to a trot, to hop over a stout rail in a corner, or a High Leicestershire stile which is simply four rails stout and high, with a footboard to help the pedestrian.

I could find two of these within half a mile of the place where these lines are being written which would tax a horse good at timber, and they are the only possible way from one field to another.

You will say it is not easy to buy such a horse. True; but the nearer you can obtain him to this standard the more fun you will have, and in Mr. Fernie's country there is no doubt that you would be better off with two such horses than with four inferior ones. When Nimrod wanted to tell of a typical ride over Leicestershire, he chose the line from Norton Gorse to Tilton Wood, as those may read who will in the thrilling story of the death of Edwin in the "Hunting Reminiscences."

Nor would any account of the country be complete without writing of its brooks, though they are to be forded and are well supplied with bridges. The Norton brook and Stonton brook are perhaps quite as often jumped on paper as in real life. This is as well, for they are ragged in their banks and generally awkward places, though they can be avoided without undue shirking. Nevertheless they do come in the line, and only in this last season six of the field flew Norton brook, led by the Master and the huntsman. Now if a friend were to ask me what was the best class of horse for High Leicestershire, I should advise him to try to keep in his mind the hunt horses, for they are not only apt to go, but they are true in type and make to the best class of grass country hunter. There are perhaps thirty of them in the stables at Medbourne, and there are few men who have not wished that they could be one of Mr. Fernie's hunt servants for the day.

Though a small country, Mr. Fernie's is rather notable for the number of huntsmen it has trained.

Mr. C. M'Neill, the Master of the North Cotswold, and Mr. Carnaby Foster, of the Ledbury, have both taken a first-class as huntsmen. Mr. C. Mills, too, is deputy-master of the Worcestershire. Then Kinch, a first whipper-in, at one time hunted the Atherstone, and of Thatcher of the Cottesmore every one has heard. All of these came out of the Billesdon country, where they were well known as hard and keen riders over the country and as careful students of the work of hounds.

Mr. Fernie's country lies entirely in Leicestershire. The kennels are at Medbourne, a pretty village on the Welland, but in the extreme corner of the county and of the hunt. They have about sixty couple of hounds in kennels, a charming pack with the true make, the good loins, the hocks near the ground and the beautiful necks and shoulders which enable them to gallop all day without tiring up and down the hills of their country, and to travel at a pace which is surpassed by no other pack of our time.

V. THE PYTCHLEY

Taking the packs in order from a centre, the pack next of importance to Market Harborough visitors is the famous Pytchley Hunt. I have dwelt on its history because, unlike the Quorn and the Belvoir, this hunt has not yet found its systematic historian. There is a pleasant book written by Mr. Nethercote which rather contains *Memoirs pour servir* than a complete account of the Hunt. Indeed, the mastership of Mr. Naylor is scarcely noted in its pages, but luckily our old friend *Baily's Magazine* has filled the gap

with the amusing Biography of a Huntsman. This huntsman was Squires, who served under Mr. Naylor and who showed good sport with a scratch pack. The story of this man's varied career as told by himself cannot be read without interest by any sportsman.

The history of the Pytchley Hunt is more closely connected with English social life in the later part of the eighteenth and the whole of the nineteenth century than that of any other. The story is full of interest and the country of associations with men celebrated not only in the chase, but in war, literature, statesmanship and commerce. Northamptonshire has been the playground of many distinguished men. The country, too, owes something to its situation, for it has at all times been accessible from London, and the railway has added to its convenience without cutting up its best hunting ground to the same extent as has been done in some other equally famous countries.

As regards hunting it is second to none, and we have on record the opinion of Osbaldeston, who hunted hounds and carried the horn in both the Quorn and Pytchley countries, that he preferred the latter. But there is no need to make comparisons, for in reality men are likely to prefer that country in which they find themselves. They can see its advantages and experience the sport which is shown. Now, in the Pytchley, as in some other famous hunting districts, there are more good runs every year than the best mounted and the boldest man can see. The Pytchley is known wherever men speak of hunting and even to those who have seldom or perhaps never joined in the sport. It is rather difficult to say exactly at what period the Pytchley country was first hunted. Probably there never was a time when the chase in some form or another did not exist in a county so suited for

it as Northamptonshire. But though we may amuse ourselves by tracing back to early times the origins of our sport, yet we must not forget that fox-hunting as we know it began with Mr. Meynell. No doubt the fox was hunted before that, but it was Mr. Meynell who first took fox-hunting in hand and out of a Squireens' exercise made of it a national sport. It is not the mere fact of chasing a fox, but the way in which it is done, which really makes fox-hunting what it is. No doubt others had prepared the way by careful breeding of hounds, and, though Mr. Meynell may have improved, he could not have invented the fox-hound.

But, though the possibilities of fox-hunting were first made known by Mr. Meynell, a many-sided man who touched life at many points, having literary and social as well as sportsmanlike tastes, the same idea had occurred earlier to the first Earl Spencer. It was the latter who founded the Pytchley Hunt Club, with the Old Hall at Pytchley as its headquarters. The rooms at the Old Hall were occupied by the members of the hunt, and at the same period the white collar was adopted as the distinctive hunt badge.

As we have already seen, from the hunting man's point of view the huntsman is no less important than the master. Indeed, the fame of every pack has been founded and established by some distinguished huntsman. What Newman was to the Belvoir, what Raven was to the Quorn, that Dick Knight was to the Pytchley. Knight was not merely a bold rider and a fine huntsman, but a man of character and much esteemed by his master. "Come along, my lord; the longer you look, the less you will like it," was his exhortation to Lord Spencer when the latter was craning at a fence. We may be tolerably sure that no member of the

hunt would have addressed the Master in such terms ; indeed, those were days when it was not etiquette for any of the field to go before the Master or the huntsman. What would have happened if they had knocked either of them down or ridden over them, as has certainly happened to later Masters and huntsmen in this country, it is difficult to say.

But while the Quorn and the Belvoir were going on and carrying out to greater perfection the principles of Meynell, the Pytchley were for a time to fall back to more old-fashioned ways. When Lord Spencer resigned he was followed for one season by Mr. Buller of Maidwell Hall, who had Stephen Goodall as his huntsman. In 1798 Mr. John Warde became Master, and under his régime everything was changed. The new Master was a hunting man of the old school. Mr. Warde had begun to hunt twenty-five years before by keeping hounds at Rouen in Normandy, and then he hunted a country which included most of the present Bicester territories for twenty years before he moved into Northamptonshire. Mr. Warde bought twenty-four couple of hounds from Lord Spencer. He lived at Boughton Hall, near Northampton, which place must not be confused with Boughton House in the present Woodland Pytchley country. In 1806 he moved to Great Harrowden, and during his mastership he built kennels near Wellingborough and also at Brigstock. These latter were for the purpose of hunting the famous Pytchley Woodlands in the Spring and Autumn. It is perhaps not necessary to say that the present Woodland or North Pytchley country was then part of the Pytchley in practice, as it is still in theory. Mr. Warde, however, did not hunt quite the whole of the Pytchley country, as Mr. Otway Cave kept a small pack of

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hounds at Stanford Park, with which he hunted the Lutterworth side.

Mr. Warde was a heavy man. He rode twenty-two stone and liked big hounds. His famous Solyman was twenty-eight inches in height. At no time were these probably a very fast pack, and towards the end of his hunting career he had them purposely kept big in condition to reduce the pace. Nevertheless he showed very good sport, and the hounds were very steady on the line, as the following may show. They found on February 3, 1802, in Marston Wood, a covert which is about three or four miles from Market Harborough. They ran down the hill into the valley, then, turning to the left, they ran through Theddingworth to the Laughton Hills, which the fox threaded, and, turning to the right by Foxton Windmill, went on over the valley to Gumley. Beyond that hounds had a view of their fox, and ran with Saddington on the left, past where the reservoir is now, up the steep hill into Kibworth, then with a left-hand turn to Wistow and by way of Stoughton, Stretton, Norton by Galley and Frisby, up to Botany Bay. Then, very slowly, they picked out the line to Cold Newton and finished by killing their fox close to Tilton village after a run of four hours and a quarter, in the course of which they ran through twenty-six parishes without going into any covert. The distance was said at the time to be twenty-seven miles, and I leave those who know the country to trace out the line on the map and to decide for themselves how far it was. Sir Henry Warde, brother of the Master, Sir Andrew Barnard, Robert Forfeit, the huntsman, and James Butter, the whipper-in, were the only men up at the finish. The hounds lay out that night at the Quorn kennels at Great Bowden

Inn, Mr. Meynell remarking that it was the most wonderful day's sport ever known with any hounds.

The following is an account of this run in a letter from a contemporary to his father :—

“The horses and I arrived here quite safely. Jim brought them in well, and with a continuance of the same good conduct is like to do well. Tell Sampson (their huntsman) that I said so. I hope you and the hounds are well and are having sport the same as we are having here. I like this country very much. The fences are built very strong; often you meet with a rail and a growing hedge and then another rail. These are to protect the hedges from the cattle which are very many here, for most of the farms are kept for grazing farms and are held by very rich men. They ride fine horses, and it is no uncommon thing to see them take two or three gates in a line.

“The members of the hunt are a very gentlemanly set but they do ride jealous. It is often a regular steeplechase, not minding much about the hounds. This is particularly the case when some of the men from the Quorn and the Pytchley meet. These two hunts adjoin, in fact the road from this town to Lutterworth is the boundary between the two. Of course we often cross over as he did in the great run I am going to tell you of, that we had the other day. Mr. John Warde is the master of the Pytchley Hunt. He is a very big man, weighing, they say, more than twenty stone. How he ever buys horses to carry him is a puzzle to me, but he does. Bob Forfeit is the huntsman and a very intelligent, clever servant. The hounds are, like their master, very big, more like mastiffs than fox-hounds, but they can hunt a fox, though they are not so fast as Mr. Assheton Smith's that hunt the Leicestershire country. Well,

I was going to tell you of the run we had the other day. I rode the big horse out of Peeping Jane you gave me; he was very restive and pulled very hard at first. They found a fox in a wood called Marston, which is on a hill looking over a very fine valley towards Mr. Assheton Smith's country. Well, the hounds were soon in full cry in the wood and presently I heard a halloa. I was glad to see hounds running well, for I can tell you I could not have held the horse another minute. We crashed through a big overgrown hedge—they call them bullfinches about here—you can't jump over them, but put up your arm and go as fast as you can and the pace and your weight carry you through or else a branch catches the horse and then you fall. Several men did fall, but the horse is a big bold fencer and he went right through, but I lost one spur, though I did not know this till afterwards.

“Well, we galloped on, hounds in full cry, down into the valley and crossed the road just below a village called Theddingworth, then we came to some steep hills with covert on the sides called Laughton Hills and so by a village named Foxton, a good name too for a Leicestershire place. There were some stiff fences here, and I had a fall at one, an ox-rail about four feet on the far side of the hedge and ditch just caught the horse's legs and he rolled over. Luckily I kept hold of the reins, and we were soon going on. This fall knocked the wind out of us both and we were some way behind, but I rode the horse steadily, like you told me to after a fall, and a very good thing it was I did, for the run was a long one. Luckily, hounds were not going very fast, but just hunting along. You could see them, and what a good thing for sport it is to have hounds that will put their noses

down. They laugh at these hounds and call them Warde's Jackasses, but they were no Jackasses the way they held the line. I got a bit of help up a lane, and when I passed Gumley hounds were beginning to run again.

"The horse was quite fresh again and beginning to pull, so I jumped out of the road and was at the bottom of the hill below Gumley and soon in the next field to the pack. Oh, it was beautiful to see them running and to hear them too, better than the Italian Opera, for you could tell what they meant! We were getting fewer now; Sir Harry Warde the master's brother was leading and then the huntsman and three of four more, and then I was coming along. The horse was quite steady now and was going most beautifully, taking all the fences as they came. You would not have had to feel ashamed of the old country. I wished some of 'ours' could have seen us.

"It was a fine country, most of it grass such as you might graze a bullock on to every acre of it. There was a place called Norton in front, and in the distance we soon saw Billesdon Coplow, and I made sure we were going there. I was beginning to wish for the end, for I did not know how much longer the horse would go on. The funny thing was that this fox did not go into the coverts but just skirted the edge. We were now a long way in the Quorn country of course. Still hounds were running on, not very fast, 'tis true, but quite as fast as we could manage. Well, in the bottom below Norton was a brook and there I had another fall, for the horse jumped at it well, but, a bit of the bank giving way on landing, we came down, but soon scrambled up. This put me further behind and, not knowing the country, I lost sight of hounds, which you can easily

do in an up and down country like this. However, I trotted on and presently met the hounds coming back. They had killed their fox near a place named Tilton-on-the-Hill.

“I trotted back with them, and they all said they never remembered such a hunt. We were about fifteen miles from where we found, but of course hounds had travelled much farther. The hounds slept that night at Great Bowden kennels belonging to the Quorn Hunt, but I rode back to Market Harborough where I was glad to find that the horse was none the worse, and Jim says that he ate up every bit of his feed, but he does not think I ought to take him out again for a week or ten days. I am very pleased with him, and to think a horse bred in our country could hold his own. Lord ——, who is here, offered me 250 guineas, but I could not sell him as he was your gift, and, thanks to my dear father’s generosity and good advice, I am not in want of money. If a good wife is far above rubies, a bold hunter is better than guineas in these hunts.”

Mr. Warde’s portrait painted by Barraud, on Blue Ruin, a wonderful blue roan with a black head, and with a favourite hound, Betsy, looking up into her master’s face, is well known and even now may not seldom be seen in print-sellers’ windows. As may be imagined, Mr. Warde found some difficulty in buying horses to carry him, though he had some good ones, Dustman, bought out of a London dust-cart, and the above-named Blue Ruin being perhaps the best. Even when master of the Pytchley, Mr. Warde would never pay large prices, and £100 was quite beyond his limit. He was something of a character and fond of a good glass of port. Several of his witticisms are related and are rather of the

THE PYCHLEY HOUNDS



sledge-hammer style, which appears to have been necessary to gain a reputation for wit in those days.

When Mr. Warde gave up his hounds in 1809, they were bought for 1000 guineas by Lord Althorp, who somewhat significantly declined having anything to do with the horses. It is probable, indeed, that he bought the hounds rather to save Mr. Warde's feelings than because he liked them. Lord Althorp's mastership was a golden time for the Pytchley. He mounted himself and his men well, and he had a capital huntsman, Charles King, whose son, Harry, was huntsman to the late Queen's Buckhounds. King was a man of unusual intelligence, as most good huntsmen are. He was also, which is not so common, a musician of considerable natural gifts. The volumes of his diary are still in the library at Althorp.

When Lord Althorp resigned the mastership in 1817, he was followed by Sir Charles Knightley and Lord Sondes, each of whom reigned but for a single season. The year 1820 was a memorable one in the history of the Pytchley, for then Sir Bellingham Graham became Master, and the kennels were built at Brixworth. "The Old Pytchley Hall Club, with all its memories and associations, was now done away with and in a few more years the ancient building (Pytchley Hall) was pulled down by order of its owner, Mr. George Payne." * For a time about this period even the white collar ceased to be worn, no doubt falling into disuse at the time that the Club of which it was a badge was done away with.

In 1821 Mr. Musters took the hounds, and during the time he was Master the sport was very good. Then came Mr. Osbaldeston, a character of whose exploits

* "The Pytchley Hunt, Past and Present," p. 48.

more than enough has been written. A vain, talkative little man, he was, say his contemporaries, a fine judge of a horse or hound, and on the whole he was a good huntsman. He could not have been quite first-rate, for he was a careless man in covert, but, once the fox was away, he was after him as quick as thought and riding alongside the leading couples. He had three first-rate whippers-in in Jack Stevens, Jim Shirley and Dick Burton, and any one of the three, but more particularly the first and last named, could be well trusted to make up any deficiencies in their master. But whatever his faults, Osbaldeston was a true sportsman and he was much missed when, in 1834, he resigned the hunt and was succeeded by Mr. Wilkins, a Welshman, who afterwards changed his name to De Winton.

Then, after the first mastership of Mr. George Payne of Sulby, came the brief and splendid reign of Lord Chesterfield. The latter kept two packs of hounds, buying the Quorn hounds from Mr. Errington. His men were well mounted, and the magnificence of the whole turn out of the hunt was such as has never been seen before or since. Will Derry was his huntsman, and the sport shown was good on the whole. Nevertheless there was perhaps more show than substance. The Master was late at the fixtures, and the members of the hunt were often kept waiting. But the resources even of Lord Chesterfield were embarrassed by this profuse expenditure. The hunt was only one of many drains on his purse. Crockford, the race-course and the Four-in-hand Club, but especially the first, crippled the Earl's resources, and he in his turn made way for Mr. T. Smith.

Of all the sportsmen of his time, this Mr. Smith—"the other Tom Smith" as he was called to distinguish

him from the famous T. Assheton Smith—was one of the best. Mr. Smith had but a scratch pack, an inferior lot of horses, and rebellious servants, yet he contrived to show capital sport, while he hunted the hounds himself. If Lord Chesterfield had many distractions and looked on the mastership as merely an episode in his career of extravagance and pleasure, Mr. Smith cared only for hunting. Yet he was a scholar and a man of considerable ability, as his books show, and "The Diary of a Huntsman" is one of the most practical and useful books on the science of hunting the fox that has ever been written.

The story of Mr. T. Smith's mastership of the Pytchley reads like a romance. He accepted the country at the request of a committee, of whom Mr. George Payne of Sulby was the spokesman. Negotiations to buy Lord Chesterfield's pack as a whole failed, and Mr. Smith started the season of 1840 with a pack from which the best hounds had been drafted for Lord Ducie. In addition, the Master had a few hounds which he brought from Wales. Thus, on the 29th of October Mr. Smith was ready to begin, and planned a day's cub-hunting at Sywell Wood. There are evidences that there had been complaints of the conduct of the hunt servants, and they confirmed the bad opinion which had been expressed of them by some members of the hunt by refusing to go out in the morning. But the Master was equal to the occasion. He told old Hayes, the feeder, and Moody, a helper, in the stable who, as he knew, had occasionally ridden a second horse, to get ready to go with the hounds, and then went back to his lodgings where he put on his red coat, and filled his pockets with bread and biscuit to throw to the hounds on their way to the covert. As he rode back with

his horn in his hand he met the malcontents, when Derry said : " Why, surely you are not going to hunt them ? You can't know them nor they you." " Never mind," was the reply ; " they'll know me as well as they know you in an hour or two." The new Master trotted away, and the whole village assembled to discuss the situation with the recalcitrant servants, who prophesied the ignominious return of the Master without a single hound. But Mr. Smith hunted a fox in Sywell Wood for two hours, marked him to ground, and brought every hound home. Soon after, Mr. Smith, still without regular servants, killed a fox from Nobottle Wood, a covert of Lord Spencer's, to the astonishment of King, " my Lord's old huntsman and the best that ever was." From that day Mr. Smith's reputation was made, though his troubles were not over. He showed excellent sport during the time that he remained. After two seasons he resigned, though the farmers and yeomen of the hunt signed a letter of regret and stated that the country had never been hunted more satisfactorily even by the celebrated Mr. Musters or Mr. Osbaldeston.

To Mr. Smith succeeded Sir Francis Goodricke, and I mention his mastership because it was marked by the fact that a pauper in receipt of out-door relief, mounted on an old bay horse, actually appeared at the meets and shared in the chase. After a time, however, the patience of the guardians of the poor broke down, and, though possibly not without sympathy for the pauper in the matter of hunting, it was decreed that no one in receipt of relief should be permitted to hunt. The story goes that the pauper hunted on foot henceforth, and the old horse was eaten by the hounds !

Surely at no period of its history was the Pytchley

more genially ruled than by Mr. George Payne of Sulby Hall. He was "pre-eminently the right man in the right place." In 1884 he began his second and longer period of mastership (he had been Master for a short time from 1835 to 1838), and, popular as the Master was, he is now chiefly remembered by the fact that he brought into the Pytchley country the most famous of their huntsmen, Charles Payn. This man, whose name deserves to rank in the annals of sport with the best of his profession, did great things for the kennel. He began with but few hounds, but the next Master, Lord Alford, who succeeded Mr. George Payne, in 1849, bought a large Belvoir draft and from that day Charles was a devoted admirer of the Belvoir blood. The hound that made the kennel was Belvoir Pillager. He hunted for six seasons, which shows that he had a constitution, never felt a thong across his back in or out of the kennel, left more than twenty couple of descendants in the kennel all marked with Belvoir tan and all worthy of their origin. Charles Payn remained with the pack during all the changes of mastership until the close of the present Lord Spencer's first term of office. Not only was he a great huntsman in the field, but he was a particularly fine horseman, as indeed a man has need to be if he is to show sport over Northamptonshire.

In 1864 came Colonel Anstruther Thomson, who settled at Brixworth and hunted the hounds himself. To write of a man who is still with us is difficult, and, though the time of his mastership is now nearly forty years since, it is never likely to be forgotten. The sport was of a very high order, even had it not been marked by the wonderful Waterloo run. Not the least remarkable feat of that great historic hunt

was the fact that the Master reached the end of it, though it took him three horses to do it. Nor must we forget the fine judgment and horsemanship of the late Captain Mildmay Clerk, who rode through the run on one horse and helped the Master to bring the hounds home at night.

Of Colonel Anstruther Thomson no better description has ever been penned than that written by his daughter. "In Spring and early Autumn," she says, "we always went to the Woodlands, for the Woodland Pytchley had not then become a separate pack, and I once more seem to see him long of leg and lithe of limb on the raking chestnut mare and hear his cheery voice drawing those great woods. And as I listen to his view halloa, I feel a thrill run through me and in fancy I see him striding down the broad grass ride while the hounds fly to him from every point and with an 'Over, over, over, over,' which simply made one shiver, he cheers them over the ride, while they swing to the right and crash into covert with a glorious burst of music like a chime of silver bells."*

The five seasons during which Colonel Anstruther Thomson kept the hounds passed all too quickly for the members of the hunt. In 1869 came Mr. Craven, and he was followed by Mr. Naylor, after which Lord Spencer took the hounds for the second time. In the history of the Pytchley it has been the exception when the mastership has been held by a landowner of the country. Of the men who have ruled the fortunes of the Pytchley few have been born or bred in the county. Thus the mastership of Lord Spencer has a peculiar importance in the history of the hunt and even to the prosperity of hunting as a sport.

There is always a possibility in those hunts which

* "Sportswoman's Library": "Fox-hunting," p. 16.

attract visitors from all parts of England that the management of the hunt may become separated from, and even antagonistic to, those who live in the county. Wealthy strangers may obtain a too preponderating voice in its affairs and, trusting too much to the power of money, they may forget that expenditure, however liberal, is one of the least of the sources of strength to hunting. The chase exists on sufferance, and the feeling which prompts men to preserve foxes or to permit the hunt to ride over their land cannot be estimated in money. The right to hunt cannot be purchased, for it is not in the market. When, therefore, a man in the position of Lord Spencer is Master, the conflicting interests are more or less easily conciliated. The hunt is felt to be a county institution and one open to all. There is a pleasure and a pride felt in its existence and its fame, and the guests and their money are welcomed. Thus, apart from a peculiar personal fitness for the mastership, Lord Spencer's three periods of office were of the greatest benefit to the hunt. He was fortunate in his huntsmen too, for Charles Payn was his servant in the first period (1862-64), while in the second period (1874-78) and the third he had the younger Will Goodall. The country was not only well managed but well hunted, and residents and visitors were alike pleased.

It has been said that Lord Spencer was somewhat too stern in his restraint of his followers. That he was firm in keeping the field in a place where they could do no mischief while the coverts were drawn must be admitted, nor was he slow to reprove those "skirters" who are great offenders in the matter of heading foxes. But the discipline made for sport, and when once hounds were fairly settled on their

fox, no fence or pace would prevent the Master from being in his right place to hold back a too eager field at the first check. Lord Spencer was nearly always at hand to support his huntsman during the run. Unfortunately after each too short period of mastership Lord Spencer was obliged to resign. On the first occasion this was on account of health, and later in response to a call from his political chief for his services. But, like Lord Althorp, his heart was always with the hunt, and I have heard that when in office he was always pleased to turn aside to hear of the doings of the Pytchley.

Lord Spencer is an example of that strenuousness in work and play which is so characteristic of Englishmen, and so unintelligible to other nations: "*Leurs sports qui n'étaient peut-être après tout qu'une forme aristocratique de la paresse,*" says M. Brunetière; and again, writing of the way that Englishmen throw themselves into sport, "*Vous êtes-vous demandés de quelle occupation après quelques heures de cet exercice un honnête homme pouvait être capable? Toute une catégorie d'Anglais ne travaille vraiment qu'à jouer, mais il est vrai qu'en revanche elle s'y fatigue épouvantablement.*" Yet the late Master of the Pytchley is but one example out of many in the Midlands of men who work and play equally hard. Lord Spencer not only brought the field into order, but he endeavoured to improve the hounds, and laid the foundation on which his successor, Mr. W. H. Wroughton, and his huntsman, Isaacs, have raised the pack, the improvement of which is marked by its successes at Peterborough and by the beautiful and musical hounds that take the field.

For the sake of convenience I have taken Lord Spencer's three periods of mastership together. But

between the second and third came the time when Mr. (now Sir Herbert) Langham of Cottesbrooke ruled the hunt with a firm but gentle hand. He was fortunate in finding such a huntsman as Will Goodall, who had been selected and trained by such a master as Lord Spencer. Born at Belvoir, educated by Sir Thomas Whichcote, and trained under such masters of the craft as Colonel Anstruther Thomson, Lord Henry Bentinck and Frank Gillard, it is small wonder that Will Goodall the second has left a good name. The quickest and brightest of huntsmen, he was as keen when carrying the horn as he had been when whipper-in to the Belvoir. His rectitude made him respected, and his manners won the affection of all with whom he came in contact. His memory lives in hunting history with that of his father, the famous Goodall of Belvoir, and the no less renowned Tom Firr of the Quorn. Mr. Langham's mastership was marked by excellent sport, and this was due in a great measure to the fact that from the moment he took over the office he determined to master the science of hound breeding.

In modern days we have perhaps been inclined to think too much of make and shape. This is important, but it is not everything. The master of a pack in the grass country, like Mr. Jorrocks,

" Full well he knows
As well as pace he must have nose."

There never was any period in the history of the Shires when hunting power in a hound was so much needed as now. Of the numerous foils and difficulties in the way of a pack of hounds I have written. There is more draining, and there are more bad foxes which are harder to kill than good ones, as every huntsman

knows. The late Lord Charles Russell said truly: "The pack that stops the least goes quickest, and the one that carries most head and has the greatest number of line hunters will be gaining on their fox, while the one that might shine for a short time on a catchy scent will be getting farther and farther behind at the first check." How true this is we see every day in the grass countries, and there is a strong conviction among some masters and huntsmen that to have sport hounds must hunt more perhaps than they have been permitted to do at times in certain hunts within the last twenty years. Nose and tongue, which Mr. Langham tried for, are as necessary in the Pytchley country as in Berkshire or Hampshire. Sir Herbert's mastership was a brilliant period in the history, and his resignation was regretted, for he, like Lord Spencer, was a man of the Shire. Of Mr. W. H. Wroughton I have already written. The present master is Lord Annaly, who is known as a hard rider and is making a name for himself as a judge of hound work.

The nature of the Pytchley country is well summed up by Whyte-Melville in a letter to Colonel Anstruther Thomson, "You know the pros and the cons of the Pytchley as well as I do. It has the best woodlands in the world. You can hunt from August to May, both inclusive, as they say. The disadvantage is the crowd on a Wednesday (that was in 1864), which you know from your experience with the Atherstone does not do half the mischief it appears as if it ought to do. If there is a scent, it is soon disposed of." On this Mr. Nethercote comments truthfully, "Given a scent, a real runaway scent, and in four minutes or less after a fox has broken cover five hundred horsemen will in no way affect the character of a run. The entourage

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of a Midland fixture at a crack meet must needs wear a more or less formidable aspect in the eyes of master and huntsman, but nothing is so bad as it seems, and it is to be doubted if an accurate return could be made of sport spoiled on these occasions whether it would not be a very humble one." *

VI. THE WOODLAND PYTCHLEY

Mention above has been made of the Woodlands, though at that time (1864) the Pytchley hunted the whole country. Lord Spencer hunted hounds in the Woodlands for two seasons, but it was not until Mr. Langham, of Cottesbrooke, took the Pytchley country in 1878 that the Woodland or North Pytchley became a separate establishment. In that year Mr. G. L. Watson, of Rockingham Castle, formed a pack at the Brigstock Kennels. He was succeeded in turn by Captain Pennell Elmhirst and Lord Lonsdale. Then came Mr. Austin Mackenzie in 1885, who remained for fifteen years and was a most successful hound breeder. His pack of hounds, which he brought with him from the Old Berkeley, had a great deal of the Blankney blood. On that Mr. Mackenzie grafted the desired Belvoir strains, and formed by degrees the magnificent pack that produced such celebrities as Vaulter, a Peterborough champion. The pack was sold to Mr. Wroughton and the present Duke of Beaufort for five thousand guineas, the latter taking the dog pack and the former the bitches. Mr. Wroughton lent the latter pack or some of it to Lord Southampton and Mr. Cazenove, who were

* "The Pytchley Hunt, Past and Present," pp. 169, 170.

successive Masters of the North Pytchley, and he himself hunts them in 1903-4. The Woodland Pytchley has a separate establishment and is independent of the parent hunt, save that the Master of the Pytchley Hunt nominates the Master of the Woodland pack when a vacancy occurs and retains the right to use some of the coverts during the cub-hunting season.

The Woodlands are, as Whyte-Melville said, the best in England, and, once outside them, the country is as good a flying country as can be found anywhere. There are small fields as a rule, for woodland hunting does not commend itself to every one, least of all perhaps to those who come to Market Harborough to hunt over the grass.

VII. THE ATHERSTONE

Of all the countries that we have written of none has more advantages than the Atherstone. Situated partly in Leicestershire and partly in Warwickshire, this country has been sometimes reckoned to belong to the Shires and sometimes to the provinces. But I have no hesitation in ranking it with the former, to which it belongs alike by its history, its situation, and the fact that it is accessible from the three centres, Rugby, Market Harborough and Leicester. Indeed, without the Atherstone the claim of Rugby to be a first-rate hunting centre would be a small one. We have seen how that town looks to the Atherstone Friday as one of its great attractions.

The Atherstone Hunt was in reality the creation of Mr. Osbaldeston; not that the country now

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known by that name was not hunted before, but there was until his time no organised hunt. Mr. Osbaldeston took the country in 1815, formed a Hunt Club at Witherley, a village close to the town of Atherstone, and built there the kennels and stables which have served the hunt till the present day. Up to that time the Atherstone country as we now know it had been hunted with the Sudbury country by Lord Vernon, who kept the hounds alternately at Gopsall and Sudbury. He is said to have hunted in excellent style. His hunt uniform was orange, and there was great rivalry between Lord Vernon's men and the Quornites when the latter came, as they often did, into the Leicestershire country of the former. But until Mr. Osbaldeston came there was no Atherstone country, except in the sense that every part of the existing hunt of that name was hunted by some pack of hounds or other. It was reserved for the Squire and his mother to give the social eminence and the sense of *esprit de corps*, which counts for so much in the well-being of a hunt. For while Osbaldeston hunted the country, his mother, who seems to have been a person of magnificent tastes, entertained the wives and daughters of the hunt members.

Then the new Master founded one of those pleasant Hunt Clubs which were so important a feature of the old fox-hunting days. The members dined together at certain intervals and subscribed for the benefit of the hunt. The Warwickshire Hunt Club at Stratford-on-Avon, the Pytchley, of which mention has already been made, and the Atherstone at Witherley are notable instances of these Clubs. Membership was sought as a social distinction as well as for the conviviality and good fellowship which

prevailed at their meetings. Nimrod mentions that his election to the Warwickshire Hunt Club at Stratford-on-Avon was a reason for hunting with the county packs. The day of Hunt Clubs is over in the Shires, though I have sometimes thought that a Club might help to solve some of the difficulties of subscription. Yet, since the essence of a club is exclusion, its existence might, in bodies so large as modern hunts, excite jealousy and ill-feeling. But there is no doubt that the Atherstone Hunt Club helped to give the hunt an independent existence and made the members feel that, like their neighbours of the Quorn and the Pytchley, they had a centre for their "patriotism" to their hunt.

The country as it now is extends from Ashby-de-la-Zouche to Coventry north and south, and from Lutterworth to Coleshill east and west. Part of the old Staffordshire side of the country is now hunted by the South Staffordshire. This is much the same hunting territory as supplied Mr. Osbaldeston with his extra days of sport, for, after he had hunted the country for two years, the number of foxes had so much increased that he was able to hunt five days a week instead of three. There is one respect in which the Masters of the Atherstone have been at a disadvantage. The country has never until now possessed a pack of hounds of its own. Each Master has been obliged to purchase the pack of his predecessor or to form a new one. It was in this way that, after various changes, Lord Anson, afterwards first Earl of Lichfield, began a memorable mastership in 1821, which lasted for ten years and was most successful. Nobody could have started under more unfavourable circumstances. Sir Bellingham Graham took his pack with him into the Quorn country.

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Lord Anson bought Mr. Mytton's hounds, which were well bred, but as wild as their master. In addition to this Lord Anson is said by contemporaries not to have been a very first-rate horseman. But when he became a Master of hounds and hunted them himself, thus, as Nimrod puts it, being "an honour to his country," he developed a great gift for making a pack of hounds.

Starting with an unpromising lot, as we have seen, in a few seasons he had a level pack with plenty of power, and the Master rode up to them taking his place in a desperately hard riding field. He had as first whipper-in Robert Thurlow, who was a man of parts, for when in the service of Mr. Assheton Smith he whipped-in to hounds in the winter, but in the summer doubled the parts of cook and boatswain on the yacht. There was among the hard riders of the hunt a certain Mr. Peel, whose manner of riding to hounds as narrated by Robert Thurlow may be given here for the obvious moral it contains: "He rides as near to hounds as any man need do, but never rides over them. If every gentleman was to ride like Mr. Peel, hounds would not so often lose their foxes, and we should have much better sport."

When Lord Anson retired, there was a rapid succession of masters and each one seems to have formed his own pack. At all events there were many changes, until at last Mr. Oakeley took the hounds, first with Colonel Anstruther Thomson in 1870, and from 1871 to 1891 by himself. His huntsman, George Castleman, was justly noted for the sport he showed, and this proved to be the beginning of a long period of prosperity to the hunt which has lasted to the present time. Mr. Oakeley was an admirable Master and he

was worthily succeeded by his son-in-law, the late Mr. Inge, and then by Mr. Gerald Hardy, who has now become Master of the Meynell, in the county where he was born and where his property is situated. The present Master is Mr. J. C. Munro, who has had the East Sussex and the Albrighton hunts successively.

If it had no wire, the Atherstone country would be one of the best in England, but then as much might be said of several others. There is, however, now, as in the past, much good sport, and if two days in the week the country is better from a riding point of view than on the others, that is equally true of the Quorn. The Atherstone is fortunate, too, in having the support of the chief landowners. Lord Denbigh's coverts at Newnham Paddox are in the middle of an excellent country, and the same may be said of Combe, belonging to Lord Craven. Gopsall is the property of Lord Howe, whose father was Master of the pack, and Lady Howe was at one time one of the five horsewomen who were said to be the best with the Quorn and Cottesmore. Then there is Mr. Newdegate, of Arbury, whose place has been made famous by George Eliot as Cheverel Manor in Mr. Gilfil's love story. I can recollect, when staying at Atherstone, that there were people who identified, or professed to identify, many of the characters in George Eliot's novels. Certainly her brother, Isaac Evans, was a keen follower of the hounds. But the Warwickshire and Leicestershire borders, even within my recollection, retained many of the old characteristics of English country life, and there was perhaps a more marked individuality and more character there than could be found nowadays. Fox-hunting at all events is indigenous, and not all the changes of

our time have much weakened the attachment of the people to it. A visitor will, of course, see little of the life of the country, mingling only as he does with a crowd on Fridays when he is with hounds.

VIII. THE WARWICKSHIRE AND NORTH WARWICKSHIRE

Like the Atherstone, the Warwickshire country has reached its present form by degrees, though the county has always been hunted as long as fox-hunting has been known. Warwickshire is indeed well suited for the sport, for within its boundaries there is a great variety of country, and almost every part of it is suitable for hunting. Indeed there is probably no single hunt which in our time or that of our forefathers can show a more consistent record of sport. It has always been a country of note, and in the first half of the last century was reckoned, during what some consider to be the golden age of fox-hunting, the third best country in England, the first and second places being assigned to Leicestershire and Northamptonshire respectively. Everything has worked for the prosperity of Warwickshire as a hunting country. The natural features of the country are favourable to hunting, and time has rather improved Warwickshire than otherwise, for up to our own day more and more of the land has been laid down in grass. Old writers seem to have looked on a great part of Warwickshire as a very excellent plough country, but even since Brooksby wrote an account of it in the *Field* in the late 'seventies, much of what was then plough has been laid under grass. Part of

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Warwickshire, of course, has always been as much a grazing country as Northamptonshire or Leicestershire, and the characteristics are much the same from a hunting point of view.

The Shuckburgh country, for example, is a fine stretch of grazing land fenced to keep in bullocks, and thus of course to be regarded with respect when hounds run over it. Indeed all the side which borders on the Pytchley is much of the same character as that country. It has been said that Warwickshire is a pleasanter and more practicable country to get over than Northamptonshire, and Nimrod, who liked it well, thought that no man who knew how to ride to hounds and had a hunter under him ought to be stopped as often in Warwickshire as he must be at times in Northamptonshire.

Since those days the limits of the country have altered, and its division into two hunts has taken place. Some of the country that belonged to the Warwickshire now forms part of the Atherstone, for in 1835 the Warwickshire stretched from Hook Norton in Oxfordshire to Newnham Paddox in Leicestershire. The woods of Warwickshire were, and are, famous as fox preserves, though the question of shooting interests must sometimes become acute in a country which has in some parts the good fortune to be almost equally suited for both sports. As a rule, however, throughout the length and breadth of Warwickshire landowners and tenants alike recognise the fact that hunting is the paramount sport of the district. Owing to the favour with which it is regarded by those whose position in the country gives them influence, hunting may be said to have in Warwickshire the weight of opinion on its side.

In the early days of the hunt the kennels and the headquarters of the Hunt Club were at Stratford-on-Avon, which is situated in the least attractive part of the country from a riding point of view. This side of the country is separated from the rest by the river Avon, and has much plough and a wide extent of woodland. But those who, like the writer, have ridden over Oxfordshire plough and formed their ideas from that, will not find the arable lands of Warwickshire so formidable as they might expect. These ploughs do not carry a bad scent and do not hold the horse in the same way that the sticky fallows of Oxfordshire or parts of Lincolnshire do. The fixtures, then, on the Stratford-on-Avon side should not be neglected, though it is a better country to begin the day, on a fresh horse, than to finish, on a tired one. The foxes are stout, and it is possible—Nimrod says it was a frequent occurrence in his time—to run right away to the Pytchley borders and thus to be in a grass country most of the way.

This, of course, means a very long point, such as foxes do not often make in these days. Nor were such distances probably ever very common. True, Nimrod sketches an imaginary run from one of the coverts at Charlecote to Wormleighton by way of Kington, Geydon, Chesterton, Tedington, Upton, Ladbroke and Southam, a line then, as now, chiefly over grass with strong, but fair, fences and no river, but nowadays there is a railway, the Birmingham and Oxford line of the G. W. R. The fine woodland country on the west is rather out of the range of territory included in this book. On the Shepston side again is a pleasant district, but that too is outside the limits of an ordinary hack to covert from the centres to which I have limited myself, and there-

fore I may pass it over here, merely noting that it is well worth a visit.

As to the Edgehill country, in 1809 from Epwell White House, in this country, took place the run which was the subject of a copy of verses by Serjeant Goulburn which were as famous in Warwickshire as Mr. Lowth's Billesdon Coplow poem was in Leicestershire. Warwickshire, in most of the districts where my readers are likely to meet the hounds, does not differ greatly from the Pytchley. The fences of Warwickshire in the grass country will have nothing strange about them to the rider from Leicestershire or Northamptonshire: thorn fences, stout and thick, with a ditch on one side, and a few oxers, which become rarer as time goes on. The stiles are of the upright, uncompromising sort familiar to us all over the grass countries. The rails with which the fences are mended are stiff and strong. There are plenty of brooks; indeed we have already seen that the presence of these daunted the redoubtable Mr Sawyer. They are not wide as a rule, but they must be jumped, and are quite sufficient to stop some horses and many men.

The founder of the Warwickshire Hunt is generally considered to have been Mr. Corbet, whose name continually meets us in the early history of hunting. He was the master of the renowned Will Barrow and the owner of the famous fox-hound Trojan, who became a toast in his own time and a myth in ours. Mr. Corbet was a model Master of hounds. Always polite and courteous, we are told that "his popularity knew no bounds. The gentlemen of the hunt honoured him, the yeomen almost adored him." He was indeed full of consideration for the latter, and would never meet in his best country on a Saturday, because

that was market-day at Warwick. He lived at Clopton House near Stratford, and always attended the dinners of the Hunt Club at the White Lion at Stratford-on-Avon every other Thursday during the hunting season. It was not a very convenient place to hunt the country from. "The town of Stratford-on-Avon, the headquarters of the Warwickshire Hunt, has little to recommend it, save a handsome church, a bridge and an excellent accommodation for sportsmen at the inns." Then, as a kind of after-thought the writer (an anonymous one in the *New Sporting Magazine*) adds, "The house in which Shakespeare was born is still standing and reminds us of a pleasing feature in ancient history." The same writer, who is enthusiastic in his praises of everything belonging to Warwickshire, adds, "The enclosures of Warwickshire are for the most part of a fair size, particularly in the grazing districts, which I should estimate at one-third of the whole extent of the country." This included, it must be remembered, what we now know as the North Warwickshire. "Taking it as a whole, I consider the soil very favourable to scent, as the staple is generally good. A great portion of the plough lands, however, are very tender after hard frosts succeeded by rains, and Warwickshire may be termed a deep country to ride over and one which requires strong and well-bred horses."

To return to Mr. Corbet, he was an excellent judge of hounds, and, although Colonel Cook, the author of the "Observations on Fox-hunting," thought (probably with justice) that Mr. Corbet was too fond of the blood of the Trojans, yet these hounds were considered to be good line hunters and very stout by those who followed them. Of Mr Corbet as a rider I have already written. He had a great knowledge

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of the country and the run of his foxes, was well mounted and not afraid to gallop, so that he generally saw at least the finish of a great run. Probably Serjeant Goulburn summed up the generally received view of his riding in the Epwell Hunt poem :

“ How he lived to the end of this terrible day
The Muse neither wishes nor ought she to say,
That he saw it, is clear, what more could old Meynell?
And witnessed th’ effects of his care in the kennel.”

At all events Mr. Corbet enjoyed himself, for his enthusiasm was unbounded and his keenness only lost its edge when ill-health forbade him to hunt.

But if Mr. Corbet was not fond of fences, his huntsman, the famous Will Barrow, was not to be stopped by anything. Like the whipper-in of the legend, it was all the same to him when he charged a fence “ whether there was a ditch or a coal-pit on the other side.” He rode so well that he was able to give his hounds immediate assistance, and, as he was at all times regardless of fences, his casts were quick and decisive. He was rather a morose, sour-tempered man, and in manner and language the reverse of his master. It is said that when a hard-riding stranger, who had, as Will thought, been riding too near his hounds, rolled over and over in a tremendous fall, “ There, thank God,” said Barrow, “ we have done with you.” Two fields later the stranger reappeared. “ The devil’s in the fellow surely,” remarked Will in despair.

The long, prosperous and popular reign of Mr. Corbet ceased in 1812, and Lord Middleton succeeded him. He was far from popular, at all events with the writers of the day. We need not dwell on the changes that followed, save to note that when Lord Middleton

resigned in 1822, the Warwickshire hounds became a subscription pack for the first time in their history, under the mastership of Mr. Shirley. But the hunt was now firmly established and went on prosperously on the whole until the division of the country into two parts. This did not take place formally until 1853, during the first mastership of Lord Willoughby de Broke, the grandfather of the present Master of the Warwickshire. The country was hunted in various ways before this, sometimes by private packs and sometimes not at all, and at other periods some coverts were occasionally drawn at the convenience of neighbouring masters. The man, however, who first showed what the North Warwickshire country was capable of being made was Mr. Vyner, the author of "*Notitia Venatica*." With the help of Mr. Bolton King of Umberslade, he established a scratch pack of about thirty couples at Solihull. Such excellent sport did he show that, the subscriptions coming in well, the hounds were removed to Leamington and remained there till they were once more removed to Kenilworth, where Lord Middleton had some kennels.

Mr. Vyner was followed by Mr. Shaw Hellier and Mr. Wilson, and then there was an interregnum of eight years, at the end of which Mr. Selby Lowndes became Master and after two seasons was succeeded by Mr. Baker. The name of this last Master will be remembered for what he did for the town of Leamington. Within two hours and a half of London and one from Birmingham, Leamington is marked out for a hunting centre. Its mineral waters, comfortable hotels and lively society draw people to spend the winter there, and, though the best meets are rather wide of the town, its other attractions will always bring a certain number of people to it. Then

of late years golf links and a polo ground have been added to its advantages. The Leamington Polo ground at Sydenham farm is an excellent one, and every year the best players may be seen at its annual tournament.

Mr. Baker further established the reputation of the North Warwickshire country by engaging Peter Collison as his huntsman and by making with his help an excellent pack of hounds. Mr. Baker worked his woodlands thoroughly, and this, too, tended to improve sport. Lastly, he made a most interesting experiment by crossing his hounds with bloodhounds. Of these a contemporary wrote, "Although some years have passed since the first cross, there remains in the descendants of the union unmistakable evidence of the bloodhound original in both colour and appearance and they are said to possess great superiority of nose." Yet the cross has not commended itself to many Masters or huntsmen, and I am inclined to doubt whether every quality that is required may not be reached by careful selection and judicious crossing of existing lines of fox-hound blood, without resorting to such violent outcrosses. However, this is by the way; and at the present time Mr. Arkwright and Tom Carr, his huntsman, have a capital pack of hounds and show great sport.

A glance at the map will make it plain that Leamington is conveniently situated for the greater part of both the Warwickshire countries, of which, as we have seen, Rugby commands the cream. Of the North Warwickshire, what is known as the Dunchurch country, which runs up in a long narrow strip between the Atherstone and the Warwickshire and borders on the Pytchley, is the best and the best known, and all that has been written of the Warwick-

shire grass applies equally to it. The North Warwickshire or the outlying quarters of the hunt need not detain us, and, not forgetting that to the roll of its huntsmen must be added the name of Tom Firr, we pass to the history of the Warwickshire since the division.

It may be doubted whether, in spite of railways, wire and mange, the golden age of Warwickshire will not be found by future historians of hunting in the late Lord Willoughby de Broke's mastership from 1876 to 1900. Not only was the sport during that time of the highest order, but with infinite pains and thought there was built up a kennel of hounds which is second to none. How Lord Willoughby de Broke did this, of his popularity with the puppy walkers, of his annual visits to the leading kennels in company with Mr. J. M. Richardson, the Rev. Cecil Legard and the late Mr. J. M. Holliday, I leave my readers to gather for themselves from the pages of *Baily's Magazine*. There they will find the story of Lord Willoughby's mastership traced by a skilled and sympathetic pen. The writer had a knowledge of his subject to which no outsider could pretend. Thus he has enabled us to see the secret of success in the pains taken in both the kennel and the field by a man who was always thorough and of undoubted ability.

The skill as a huntsman which enabled the late Master of the Warwickshire to show such unrivalled sport was the result of study and pains. Always a forward rider, he was able during Mr. Lucy's mastership to watch the methods of Robert Worrall and Charles Orvis, two excellent sportsmen and thorough huntsmen who carried the horn at that period. During the latter part of the time of Orvis's service Lord

Willoughby de Broke was hunting hounds one day a week in a rough plough and woodland part of the country. It was hard work, but the young Master showed the same pluck and endurance with which he afterwards bore the long purgatory of a most trying and painful complaint. In 1881, when Orvis left the hunt, he took the horn himself and for many years hunted the hounds with the same indomitable judgment and perseverance that he showed throughout his life. One incident I cannot forbear quoting, for it is, so far as I know, unparalleled in hunting story.

It was "when hounds came down Shuckburgh Hill into a dense fog the master rode over that stiff country to Calcot to the cry of the hounds . . . he told me that the fog lifted for a moment and he saw the fox nearly beat and Sparkler running him alone." *

Of the Masters of our time he was perhaps the most successful in dealing with the wire difficulty. "He could stand on Brailes and Ilmington Hills and look over the whole country and know that there was scarcely a strand of wire in it and that the hounds were everywhere welcome." It is, therefore, small wonder that sportsmen and hard riders flocked to the country and that Warwickshire stands high for sport. When, too, I look up and see before me as I write the engraving of the fine portrait that was presented to Lord Willoughby de Broke on his retirement, I feel that we have had in our generation a Master of hounds who, in all the relations of life as in the practice of sport, stands as an example to those who shall come after him. Hunting is not in danger while we have such men to lead us in the sport and to rule over our hunting countries.

* *Baily's Magazine*, March, 1903, p. 202.

CHAPTER VI

RIDING OVER THE SHIRES

Ways of Riding to Hounds—Value of Experience and Practice—
Motives for Hard Riding—Strange Horses and Fine Horsemanship—School Riding—Polo as a School of Horsemanship—Scent in a Grass Country—Effect of Large Grass Fields—Great Run by the Cottesmore—Another by Mr. Fernie's Hounds—Opinions of Charles Isaacs—Hounds Changing their Fox—A First Experience in Leicestershire—Quickness in Starting—Advantage of knowing what Hounds are doing—Two Classes of Hunting Men—Ability to Gallop.

I. PRECEPT

THERE are as many ways of riding to hounds in Leicestershire as there are different sorts of men and horses. It may indeed be possible to lay down rules and construct precepts for the benefit of the beginner, but it must ever be borne in mind that riding to hounds is not an art that can be learned from books.

A man might read all that has been written on the subject, from Nimrod to Whyte-Melville and the Badminton Library; he might conscientiously put in practice all the advice to be found in the pages of these writers; and yet would not improbably find that he seldom saw a run to his own satisfaction. Not that such study would be thrown away; still less would time be wasted in watching those who go well; for in this, as in so many things, example is better than precept.

Yet still more is to be gained by actual experience. Other things being equal, the man who is most often in the saddle will be the best rider to hounds. For, after all, a great deal depends on natural aptitude and almost as much in most cases on the horse we ride.

The gifts of nature may be cultivated by taking pains and must be perfected by practice. Everything about horses and riding is worth knowing, and each accession of knowledge will be an addition to our pleasure.

Many hunting men who are fair performers over a country rather despise the niceties of school-riding and the arts of the *manège*. But in this they are mistaken. A man who understands the refinements of horsemanship is likely to cross a country with more ease and safety than one who does not. There is always a right and a wrong way of meeting every emergency that may arise in the course of a day's hunting. It will depend on our having given time and attention to practise the right way until it becomes a habit whether we shall in any given case act rightly or wrongly. If we are riding a run with fox-hounds over the grass, the time given for thinking will be very short. A rapid decision must be followed by instant action, and the arts of school-riding should teach us how far we can really help a horse. It very often happens that, with the best intentions, we hinder him when he is in difficulties far more than we help him. Practice will enable us with the help of the legs and the bridle to suggest to the horse what he shall do, as well as tell us how to avoid that interference with him which is so often fatal.

Then we have to consider the powers and disposition and even the previous training of the particular

animals we ride and adapt ourselves to them. There is no way of doing this except by riding different horses. Some men can only go well on certain animals, and when, in course of time, these horses break down or wear out, the riders perforce join the ranks of those who seek no longer to be with hounds. They ride about happy if two or three times in the run they can see the pack, and are contented if they can trace the line of a good hunt sufficiently well to be able to talk it over with their friends after dinner. It will be found in most cases that the men who ride longest in the front rank are those whom circumstances constrain to ride many different horses in the course of their career. A well-known rider across Leicestershire once said that he had seen many men retire comparatively early because they allowed themselves to become so attached to particular horses that they could ride no others. For this reason he had made a rule to sell at least two of his horses every year and replace them with new ones. Every one must have noticed how those who are obliged by circumstances to part with a horse directly they have an offer of a large price are as a rule going well long after their contemporaries have ceased to ride straight. It may be said, of course, that such people are more or less riding to sell and that it is their interest to go well. But no amount of gain in prospect will enable a man or woman to ride straight to hounds over a stiffly fenced grass country if the nerve is once gone. On the other hand, so great is the enjoyment of taking and keeping a forward place in a fast run with foxhounds, that no other stimulus is needed to spur us on to make the effort if it is within our power.

It is strange how we sometimes see the strongest motives of interest fail to make men ride hard. Take

the case of hunt servants, who have every inducement to ride. Their reputation and their livelihood depend on their doing so. Yet we sometimes see them fail. For example, there was Ben Morgan, who, when whipper-in to Sir R. Sutton, and when he had little or no choice of the animals he rode, was as fine a horseman as ever crossed a country. In due time he became a huntsman, but from this point in his career he was only at his best on a horse he liked. If his horse did not suit him, he would not try, and thus he was not a success.

In all countries it is an advantage for the huntsman to be close to his hounds, but in Leicestershire it is absolutely necessary if he is to show sport.

To be able to ride strange horses to hounds requires, as I think it preserves, a firm nerve, but it is also certain that fine horsemanship is most desirable. It may, of course, be said, and with considerable plausibility, that the rough and ready riders do go successfully to hounds. We have all known men who were ignorant of and indifferent to all niceties of horsemanship, who crammed along when hounds ran hard. But of such horsemen severe falls take a heavy toll. They spend a considerable portion of their hunting career in compulsory inaction while broken bones are mending. For the daring but ignorant rider is sure to have a great many falls unless indeed he has a long purse and only keeps the most perfect horses. But even then his sins of omission and commission in the saddle and with the bridle are sure to find him out, and sooner or later he will come to grief. In any case a horse, however first-rate, if ridden by a bad horseman is not likely to reach the end of a long and brilliant run. In short scurries of ten minutes, or in ringing gallops, he may

hold his own fairly well, but of a long, fast and straight run he is not likely to see even the greater part.

To every man who aspires to a high place in the hunting field I should like to give a preliminary education in school-riding. Not, of course, that there is any wish to bring the tricks of the manége or riding-school into the hunting field, but because we cannot possibly know too much about horses and riding. If then you are not among the most wealthy, it is quite possible to improve a horse greatly by being able to teach him to go in true form. Many horses are awkward and disagreeable because they are only half broken and have never been taught the use of their limbs. And though for the horse, as for his master, the hunting field is no doubt the finishing school, the university in which each must take his degree, yet I believe in preliminary lessons for both, in the school and on the road.

It adds interest to our rides to make our horses go in proper form, to trot and canter and walk well, collectedly and neatly, and to change their legs as required. Of course, I know that many men ride only when they are hunting or playing polo, the bicycle and the motor-car having to a great extent taken the place of the hack. Nevertheless there are many who will agree that riding is the pleasantest, the most interesting, and the healthiest method of taking exercise. It is quite certain too that the man who hacks about in the summer will enjoy his hunting the more for doing so. I should go further and say that a summer's hacking, due regard being had to the state of the ground, is an excellent way of finding out much about a new hunter. It is like an engagement which may enable a couple to learn if they are suited to one another.

But on this matter it is vain to preach, because most people, and particularly those who hunt in Leicestershire, have an unceasing round of occupations and no time even to think of one sport when the next is pressing on their attention. Fortunately for the horsemanship of the country the game of polo has become fashionable ; not only so, but the game, as played nowadays, requires trained ponies, and this has forced men to give more attention to schooling. People can scarcely fail to ask themselves why it is that polo ponies are for the most part so pleasant to ride, and to apply the reflections that follow to the training of hunters. Polo, moreover, I believe to be an excellent school of horsemanship. Practice at the game gives strength of grip and an easy balance and teaches the rider not to hold on by the reins.

To return, however, to the subject of riding over Leicestershire, from which the above is a not irrelevant digression. The better hack a horse is on the road, the pleasanter hunter he will be ; and most of the qualities of a hack can be taught to a true-shaped horse, such as a Leicestershire hunter must be. In the same way, the better horseman the rider is, the more he will enjoy his hunting. So far, however, what has been written would apply to any hunting country. Now, supposing the rider to have progressed so far as to be a fair horseman and a good performer over other countries, he may ask what is the difference between riding over grass countries and provincial. The first and most important quality necessary in the former is quickness both of decision and of action. The man who hesitates in Leicestershire is out of the run. If I may be permitted a bull, hounds travel so much faster over the grass

even when they are hunting slowly than they do over plough, that we are much sooner left behind than we should be where hounds meet alike with a colder scent and more hindrances.

In a grass country the scent keeps on improving as hounds drive forward, so that the chances are that a pack once settled to the line of their fox will keep on running faster and faster. Scent, it is true, often dies out very quickly in grass countries, but while hounds can run on it at all, they can always run forward with more confidence than they do over a plough country. When they cease to drive, they very often cease to run. It follows from this that hounds soon run away from the laggards.

Then there is another point. The grass fields are very large, some of the pastures round Foxton, Carlton Curliu, Noseley, Rolleston and Skeffington being of immense extent. They are perhaps sixty or a hundred acres, or even more. Such great fields offer no obstacle to a pack of hounds, and, as we all know that hounds are faster than horses, the pack will soon leave us hopelessly out of the hunt if we do not keep near them. If there is a scent, indeed, we may fail even with our very best efforts to remain on terms with the hounds. Let me give an instance. In the season of 1901-2, the Cottesmore hounds found a fox in Skeffington. There was no great scent in the woods, a single hound throwing his tongue at intervals all down the covert. The huntsman, of course, kept moving on, and near him were three men whose names, were I to write them down here, would be those of men who are heard of in most good runs, though none of them are very young. When the hounds reached Priesthill Coppice, they burst into a loud chorus and raced away. There were but

these men with them, and in a short distance the hounds had beaten even them. The huntsman, Arthur Thatcher, one of the most gallant riders across Leicestershire, and mounted on one of Mr. Hanbury's good horses, could never reach them, the three fields which hounds had gained in the few moments it took him to disentangle himself from the covert having given them a hopeless advantage. Two of the other men, good as they were, were farther behind, while a fourth, who started as well as any one, being on a slow horse, was fairly distanced before the pack threw up near the Coplow.

Again, Mr. Fernie's hounds had on Friday, January 30, 1903, one of those magnificent runs that will always make the season of 1902-3 memorable to those who hunted in Leicestershire.

The Master was unwilling to disturb Glooston Wood, and the huntsman found his fox without ever going into the covert at all. He touched the horn, and a travelling fox boldly faced the open for Loddington. The dog pack were laid on at once, and within a single field they were 150 yards clear of the horses. The turf was sound, and horses had everything in their favour, yet hounds beat them all the way to Keythorpe.

Now in a case like this, only those men who started close to the hounds would see anything of the fun at all till the first check. If this check should come at the end of but ten minutes at the best pace, you will have thrown away the most delightful moments of the day. Most likely you will have galloped very fast, jumped several fences with the backs of the leaders as your guide, only to find when you catch sight of the pack that they are running as fast as ever. A first-rate pack of hounds will have made



BILLEDON COPILOW

their own cast and hit off the line, or failed to do so, and been put right by their huntsman in a very short space of time, and be away again so that you will never have a pull at your horse. Thus you start on the next stage at a disadvantage with the men who were close to the pack when they checked, since they have had the inestimable benefit of a pull back into a trot. How great that advantage is you will soon learn in Leicestershire, for the chances are that you will have galloped down one slope and up another and jumped six or seven fences before you reach the hounds. Even the best horse will be the better for catching his wind for a moment after this, but, since you find hounds running on when you reach them, you cannot pull up. So on you must gallop and jump, if you really mean to keep with them. Now, your only chance of saving your horse is that hounds will not run quite straight, and you must on a scenting day try to make the best of your bad start by easing him as opportunity offers. The very best horse cannot go on up and down the Leicestershire hills and over the ridge and furrow for a long time at the pace which the Pytchley, the Cottesmore or Mr. Fernie's bitch pack will run.

You may take liberties with your horse, perchance saying to yourself, "No fox can stand up before hounds very long at this pace." Of that, however, I am not so sure. The last Duke of Rutland used to say that, with an old dog fox in front, it was six to four on the fox, and Mr. Fernie's huntsman, Charles Isaacs, who hunts hounds in one of the best scenting countries in England, has told me the same. He had, in fact, the day before he spoke of this, been beaten by a fox that had been raced to Launde Wood from Glooston, and, though after this the fox was

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probably out of his country, he escaped some miles farther on near Knossington. We may be sure that there was want of neither skill nor pace on the part of his pursuers.

Even supposing that one of the short running foxes, which are so common, is before hounds, yet foxes are plentiful, and hounds may change and run harder than ever with the fresh scent. An example of this may be taken from a run which took place last season (1901-2) and which was, I think, the straightest fox-hunt I have ever known. Hounds were scarcely thirty or forty yards out of the direct line all the eleven miles from Mr. W. W. Tailby's covert at Slawston to Botany Bay. In this case two, perhaps three, foxes in succession were in front of hounds, and none but the foremost riders could have had a chance to steady their horses from start to finish. Hounds hesitated, they did not check, at Noseley coverts, so there was no time for a slow starter to ease his horse.

Therefore, once with hounds, it is wise to take every chance. If hounds lean—and runs so straight as the last mentioned are very unusual—to the one hand or to the other, be ready to bend with them. If they are turning towards you, it is worth while to diverge a couple of hundred yards or so from the direct course to a gate, if you can arrive there before the crowd. Every man in Leicestershire should be able to open a gate. They are well hung and easy as a rule; and if you do not know how to manage them, it certainly will not be for want of practice. All over Leicestershire the cross roads are gated, and you can hardly ride to covert without opening half-a-dozen. But to return to the subject of a quick start. The only way is to keep touch with

the hounds whatever they are doing. In Leicestershire the fields are numerous, and it is worth while to work your way quietly to the head of the line. In the small coverts quick finds are the rule and outlying foxes not uncommon. When you arrive at the covert, keep with the rest of the field where the master places you. Do not wander vaguely about. But there is no harm in being near the gate, or opposite a practicable place in a fence, so that you can start at once.

When I first hunted in Leicestershire, a friend said to me: "You cannot hope to be with hounds in these countries till you know something of them. You would be pounded or come to grief in these fields. But if you will promise not to ride over me, you may follow me till you can go alone."

Accordingly, the first day I watched my friend from a respectful distance, while Gillard and the Belvoir hounds were drawing Melton Spinney. The first notes of a halloa struck on my ear and in a moment I saw my pilot race off at a pace that made it hard to keep him in sight. "At this rate we shall not last long," was my thought; but I saw the reason of the haste later on. Quick as my pilot had been, the hounds were two fields away when we first saw them. Then a turn in our favour enabled us to take a pull; a momentary hover—you could not call it a check—gave another chance, while those behind must have been unconscious that hounds had ever done anything but hold right on. They must therefore have been galloping their best all the time.

Quickness in starting, which means to see what ought to be done and to do it at once without hesitating, since every moment the hounds are driving farther and farther away, is one great means by

which you will see the best of the sport in the Shires. If hounds always raced on, very few people would see much hunting, but the less prompt division have still two points in their favour. One is the extraordinary number of shepherd's dogs in the Shires, and the other the fact that, if hounds do not change, the fox, generally speaking, is sure to turn before long. The ordinary Leicestershire fox does not know very much country, and the instinct of the fox, indeed I believe of all wild animals when they reach the limits of their beat, is to work back to the original starting place. When I hunted jackals in India, I found that, like foxes, each jackal had his run and that when he reached his limit he would invariably turn back. This knowledge, when he grasped it, gained the huntsman some undeserved praise for successful casts.

This brings me to the second point which I believe to be of great importance in riding over Leicestershire so as to obtain the greatest enjoyment. We ought always to know what hounds are doing. Every one has heard the story of Lord Alvanley and his alleged saying about what fun we might have if it were not for "those d—d hounds," though I do not believe so good a man over a country ever did say anything so foolish. Somebody said it for him, or it was fathered on him, as speeches wise and otherwise are apt to be on acknowledged wits. So far as my own observation goes, the best men in grass countries watch hounds most attentively, know what they are doing, and are very often able to form an "intelligent anticipation" of what they are going to do. Indeed the only thing that can keep men with hounds after the first flush of youth is over is the love of hounds and their work. This is to be found the

most often among first-flight men. Who, indeed, see so much and thus are so well able to form conclusions about the work of hounds as they? True, there are men in Leicestershire as elsewhere who merely come out for a ride, but they do not "stay" as hunting men. When the mere love of rapid motion and the thrill of galloping over big fences ceases to charm, they will drop back into the crowd or take to golf or motors. But the men who really love hounds and delight in their working will continue to face big fences rather than not see the hunt, long after the pursuit of danger for its own sake has ceased to attract. The former class of men have taken up hunting, as they take up polo, as a fashionable amusement, but they are not born with the love of the chase and sooner or later they will give it up.

The most famous riders have undoubtedly ridden to hunt. Take Assheton Smith, for example, the greatest rider to hounds of the last century. Mr. T. A. Smith was strangely indifferent to and careless about his horses. He had no fancies or preferences in the choice of hunters, for with a strong seat, a light hand and an iron will he used the horse as a means to an end. He meant to be in every field with his hounds, and he was so in the majority of cases. He took his sixty or seventy falls in the season as a matter of course, for he cared above all things to see hounds hunting in grass countries, where they can best be seen. If he cared little for horses, he was always thinking about his hounds. This was one reason why he did not enjoy his hunting less in Hampshire when he was obliged by a sense of duty to hunt there. We read, too, how Mr. Osbaldeston, after he had certainly lost something of the

boldness of his earlier days, faced a big fence from Waterloo gorse in order to be with the hounds. "Osbaldeston rode Pilot and I shall never forget the beautiful manner in which he put him to a leap just at starting, taking him back several yards into the field and going at it as hard as ever he could drive, indeed nothing but the impetus could have carried him through. For it was a stiff fence with a wide brook on the other side and very indifferent landing. Still I should not say Osbaldeston was fond of rasping." No, but his hounds were just starting and he knew they might want his assistance, as hounds often do, especially when coming out of a covert with a scent and fairly close to their fox. Their over eagerness in such a case will sometimes carry them over the line, and their huntsman being at hand to put them right will make all the difference between a good and a bad run, or even between a good run and none at all. The times when hounds are most likely to lose their fox are at the very moment of starting and when running for blood at the close.

How, then, are we to gain this knowledge of hounds? To some men it comes almost unconsciously. Early associations, the Eton, Christ Church or Trinity Beagles, running with harriers or with otter-hounds, or following the home pack on a pony, all these are ways of learning what it is of the first importance for us to know.

Many of us can never remember the time when we did not look on the hounds and their working as a subject for thought and conversation. But still much may be acquired in later life and much can be learned by reading and close observation of a pack at work. In the latter case we soon begin to distinguish some hound that often puts the pack right, we are

able to judge when hounds have overrun the scent, to see, when they cast themselves, which way they are leaning and to anticipate a turn. We may, too, if we hunt in the same countries year after year learn much about the run of the foxes, all of which knowledge, as we have seen, is of great value.

Another condition of success is that we must be willing and able to gallop. For twenty men that will jump a big fence there are only four or five, if so many, who will gallop. Yet in Leicestershire, where scent is strong and the pace is necessarily fast, we must send the horse along, and we must ride faster at our fences than would be quite orthodox in other countries. If you watch a real master of the art, you will see him swinging along, not bucketing indeed but galloping a fair pace and taking the fences at the places he has marked out for himself, without ever pulling his horse out of his stride.

It has been said that men ride *over* the Quorn country, but *through* the Pytchley; meaning that in the first case, galloping on the top of the ground, they fly big, but clean, fences, while in the other case they dash through hairy obstacles of the nature already described. The distinction is not perhaps so clearly marked as it was when first made, but there is still some truth in it. One thing, indeed, is certain. Through or over, in most cases—not in all, for there are no absolute rules in hunting—you must go fast. You cannot afford to lose time at the fences. True, to ride a horse fast at his fences takes more out of him than to go slowly, but in Leicestershire, if you have only one horse, you must make up your mind to go home early, while if you have a second one, you will take to him when the first is played out. In any case a sticky horse is out of place. To ride in the

easy way some men do, presupposes knowledge of the country. You cannot, remember, go quickly over Leicestershire unless you have either a first-rate pilot or know something of the country. Without one or the other you will certainly be in difficulties before long. The men who swing with such apparent ease over the country know their way and go quickly and directly from one practicable place to another, for the fences in some districts are not always, as I have shown, to be jumped everywhere.

What I have said here, while it makes no pretension to teach the reader how to ride across Leicestershire, brings before him those things which must be attended to if success is to be attained. We must be quick to start, ready to note what hounds are doing and what they are about to do, and able and willing to gallop.

CHAPTER VII

RIDING OVER THE SHIRES

Experience of the Grass Countries—Views of Nimrod, the Druid and Whyte-Melville—Other Great Riders—Assheton Smith—Mr. Greene of Rolleston—Dick Christian—His Preference for Young Horses—Sir Harry Goodricke—Lord Forester—Lord Wilton—Tom Firr—Reckless Riders—Mr. Morant—Mr. Canning—Lord Lonsdale—The “other” Tom Smith—His Sport with the Pytchley—Lord Sefton—Mr. Corbet—Mr. Stubbs—Rival Methods—Economic Sport—Mr. Carrington—Other Great Riders of the Past—A Lady’s Account of a Hard Run—Fences and Gates—Difficult Places.

II. EXAMPLE

QUICKNESS and some knowledge, or perhaps it would be better to say some experience, of the grass countries is, as I have tried to show, required before you can hope to ride over them. Nevertheless the truth is that there are and must be many different ways of doing this, since no two men are quite alike in their methods, and no two horses in their powers. It has therefore seemed that it may not be unprofitable to collect what information can be found about the methods of famous men in bygone days, and to see how they crossed the country. For the beginner and for the moderate performer there may be in this inquiry both instruction and consolation.

The best authorities on riding across Leicestershire unquestionably are three: Nimrod, the Druid, and Whyte-Melville. The first and last of these tell us

of what they have seen and known, for each hunted with the hounds of which he wrote. They lived too with the best men who rode over Leicestershire.

Nimrod was unquestionably a fine horseman. He was perhaps what we should call a "bit of a coper," but he was perfectly frank on the subject and he rode none the worse that he rode to sell, while perhaps he wrote all the better, for he was forced to keep a keen eye on the peculiarities of his contemporaries, to whom he generally had a horse to sell. Whyte-Melville is the most delightful writer on sport that there is in the English language. This no doubt is because he was so much else beside being a sportsman ; a genuine scholar, a lover of literature and a storyteller of the most delightful kind. *Riding Recollections* and *Market Harborough* will probably live as long as men love sport and are willing to read about it. But Whyte-Melville had theories about riding and horses. He believed in thoroughbreds as hunters, in which faith very few people will be with him in practice, and he has, it is believed, laughed gently and good-humouredly at his own theories in *Market Harborough*, where he appears for a few pages in the character of Captain Struggles. Yet theories about riding are useful reading because they make us think, though they are not, even from such delightful pages as those of Whyte-Melville, to be put in practice absolutely or slavishly.

The following examples may help to show what some of the great men of old did and why they did it. One of the greatest riders across country was Mr. Assheton Smith, and, though so much has been written about him, it is impossible not to allude to him. The keynote of his style of horsemanship was resolution. He was a man of strong will and great

nerve and he meant to go into every field with his hounds. Now, resolution goes far in riding to hounds, for a man and horse can generally go where the man really wills. Moreover, a man of resolute character will cross a country with more glory and more safety than the faint-hearted would imagine to be possible. Constant practice and his perfect condition had something to do with Mr. Assheton Smith's success, of which he himself always said the chief secret was that he could make his horses gallop.

An even better horseman was Mr. Greene of Rolleston, who shares with Lord Stamford and the present master of the Quorn the distinction of being the only Leicestershire squires who have ever held that office. The other aspirants to fine horsemanship at the time used to study Mr. Greene. It is said that he used his legs to convey his meaning to his horse far more than he did his bridle. This is undoubtedly one secret of successful riding. Like Mr. Assheton Smith, he liked to ride at his fences somewhat aslant. But he came to them with bounding strokes to the last, when he slackened his rein and allowed his horse to exert its full power, the fling almost invariably bringing him safely into the next field.

Indeed, I believe that this letting the rein slacken as the horse takes off to be one of the secrets of safety. Let the horse, as he stretches over a big place, run the reins through your fingers so that there is no restraint on him; yet do it in such a way that you can hold him together directly he gets into his stride. A horse is far less likely to fall on landing if he has his head free than if he is held up. Yet it must be borne in mind that most, or at all events many, horses need to be held together with firm grip in going up to a fence or they will take off anyhow.

For, while some perfect horses will jump if ridden at their fences with but the lightest pressure on their mouths, others need to be taken by the head lest they refuse. This is one of the difficulties that practice, experience, and a knowledge of your horse must help you to decide. Every one, however, must have noticed how much more pleasantly those horses jump which require the least pressure.

Plenty of rein on landing, too, is the secret of avoiding falls. On this point Dick Christian has something to tell us. He was a fine horseman, as we all know, and in his lectures, which every one should read, there are many excellent hints based on an amount of practice that it is given to but few people to have. For many years Dick Christian rode horses at fifteen shillings a day, in order to make them into hunters. Thus, what he did not know about horses and riding is not worth mentioning.

He was a great advocate for what he called "setting at liberty on a horse. A man's body should be all loose, but he should be firm in his thigh. You shouldn't be able to see under 'em when you're behind 'em." A little observation in the hunting field will show us how seldom this latter condition is fulfilled by hunting men. Yet if a man rolls in his saddle, if he has not ease and liberty, be sure that he must be steadying himself by his horse's mouth. This it is that makes so many horses unpleasant to ride. Dick, too, preferred young horses to old ones, for he thought them safer, and he was probably right. Yet most unquestionably an old horse that knows his business is more pleasant to ride. The idea that Dick had, and one that a great many people share with him, is that the young horse is quicker to extricate himself from a difficulty, while the old horse, as

he puts it, "falls like a clot." Undoubtedly this is true, but perhaps the balance is more even than Dick thought, seeing that the clever old horses fall more seldom. A precept that is well worth bearing in mind is that when you are trying a horse before buying him, you should ride him down hill, and that, when you have bought him, you should give him his conditioning work up hill.

Sir Harry Goodricke, on the other hand, who was a strong, resolute rider and always near his hounds, rode through rather than over a country. He would creep or force his horse through the hedges. In fact, this plan has been followed by many heavy-weights, for nothing takes so much out of a horse as jumping high and big with a heavy weight on his back. The combined weight of man and horse will drive them through places that a light-weight will be forced to jump. A proof of this is that in a strongly fenced country it will often be found that the heavy-weights will beat the lighter men. The latter break their horse's hearts, as old John Warde used to say, by continually jumping, where the impetus of the heavier ones will carry them right through. It needs nerve, indeed, to ride through a country quite as much as to ride over it. Lord Alvanley was another heavy-weight and a very bold one, who rode as much through the country as over it. We learn this from those curious boots of his made to cover and protect his knees from the blows of branches, of which a picture may be seen in Mr. Birch Reynardson's *Sport and Anecdotes*.

Two or three men have been noted for their power of crossing Leicestershire without any apparent effort. They may, indeed, be said to have glided over it. It was not till their followers arrived at the fences

that they discovered how big those obstacles were which had been got over so easily. The earliest of these of which we have any record was the first Lord Forester. He was a heavy-weight, yet a horse, it is said, would stay under him a longer time than under many a far lighter man. Nimrod, who knew him well and had followed him over a country, accounts for this by the fineness of his hand and the care he took to prevent his horses from leaping higher or farther than was absolutely necessary to clear their fences. Very similar must have been the style of the Lord Wilton, whom no one ever saw in a hurry, who was never far from hounds and who yet never saw—so he said—the big places others talked of.

Last, but not least, came Tom Firr, the famous huntsman of the Quorn, who was as notable as a horseman as he was in killing his foxes. He too was one of those men who rode quietly and resolutely and had the art of handing his horses quietly over big fences. He sat forward, just behind his horse's shoulders, leaning the upper part of his body well back at the fences and, with long reins, giving the horse plenty of liberty at his jumps.

In contrast to such as these are the men who are always in a hurry, the reckless, hard-riding ones, who seldom see the whole of a run. It is related of a certain Mr. Morant, who hunted in Warwickshire early in the last century, that no horse could live with him in a fast run for more than fifteen minutes. He was a most determined rider, but had little judgment, and it was a matter of indifference to him whether his horses cleared their fences or not so long as he reached the next field.

Of a different type from Mr. Morant was another



A TYPICAL LEICESTERSHIRE COUNTRY

SMEETON GORSE FROM GUMLEY



A HAIRY PLACE

PLATE XI

Warwickshire sportsman, Mr. Canning, who was so fine a horseman and so undefeated over the stout Warwickshire fences that Nimrod opines he was sent into the world on purpose to show what a horse could do. He was six feet four inches in height and rode seventeen stone; yet, like all heavy men with judgment, he not only stayed through a run, but hunted in the front rank of riders for a great many years of his life. "When hounds ran," said a contemporary to Nimrod, who tells the story, "Mr. Canning came out of the crowd like a bee out of the hive, and beat every man that was out."

Possibly among heavy-weights in our time the present Lord Lonsdale most resembled Mr. Canning in judgment and knowledge of pace. He too is quick to be with hounds when they run. A fine huntsman, he has the inestimable advantage of knowing what hounds are doing and thus is enabled to save himself by many a turn. Few men have combined knowledge of hunting and skill in horsemanship in a greater degree than the late master of the Quorn.

But we may return to the famous riders of the past, of whom we are able to write with a freedom that we cannot use of our contemporaries. After all, human nature in the saddle and out of it is much the same at all periods, and the observant man in Leicestershire to-day will see men crossing the country who show the same characteristics in their riding as did those of whom we have spoken. All whom we have named have their prototypes in the present. Similar effects are produced by like causes, and the success which our riders to hounds have to-day is due to the same boldness, judgment, fineness of hand and ease of seat, that made men like the Lord Forester, Lord Wilton, Mr. Maxse, Mr. Little Gilmour, Dick

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Christian and Mr. Osbaldeston famous in hunting history.

The "other" Tom Smith, too, was like his namesake an admirable horseman. He never had the purse of Mr. Assheton Smith, but his feats of horsemanship were not less remarkable, though they have been somewhat overshadowed by those of the better-known founder of the Tedworth Hunt. That he had courage and fine hands the following incident shows. Mr. Smith was on a visit to Mr. Chute of The Vine. The master, anxious to show his visitor what the pack—whose motto inscribed above the kennel door was "*multum in parvo*"—could do, ordered the hounds out in a frost. There was a scent as there often is at such a time. The fox took a line over some of the steep hills of the Vine hunt, and every one was left behind save Mr. Smith, who went on with the hounds and killed the fox.

But perhaps there has been nothing more remarkable in the history of horsemanship in the Shires than the sport Mr. Smith showed with the Pytchley. Taking the country without an established pack of hounds, he collected a scratch pack. He was, of course, a stranger to the country and he had no assistance in hunting the hounds owing to the misconduct of the men who had been spoilt by Lord Chesterfield's somewhat extravagant régime. Yet he not only hunted the hounds himself, but showed wonderful sport, and pounded the whole field of Pytchley men near Yelvertoft over a stiff fence consisting of a high stout rail with a deep and wide ditch on the far side. The result of this exploit was that Mr. Smith was the only man who saw the run.

At an earlier period came Lord Sefton, who was the immediate successor of Mr. Meynell in the master-

ship of the Quorn. Lord Sefton was a heavy-weight, but nevertheless a very quick man to hounds. Though seldom left behind at the start, no one could make up lost ground quicker than he. Timber he disliked and always preferred boring through the thick blackthorn hedges. This his weight enabled him to do, and probably nearly all heavy-weights would do the same, though many light and medium-weights, and perhaps most ladies, would prefer a post and rails to a hedge. So many fences in the Shires are mended with rails that you can almost always find timber to jump if your tastes lie that way. Lord Sefton loved pace, and it was the difficulty of finding horses to gallop under his weight which at last caused him to give up hunting for the raising of fat bullocks. In a poem quoted by Nimrod he is touched off in four lines :

“Earl Sefton came next, and, for beef on the rib,
 No Leicestershire bullock was rounder ;
 A wonderful weight at a wonderful rate,
 He flew like a twenty-four pounder.”

Lord Sefton was the introducer of second horses. His second horse was, however, not ridden to points as our custom is to-day, but close behind him, so that he could change whenever it seemed desirable.

It appears to me, as I study the records of the past, that most of the hard riders in those days were heavy-weights, but that may well be because their feats were more wonderful and their deeds consequently more fully recorded. Certain points all those famous men had in common. All rode the best horses they could find, and hunters seem to have brought larger prices than they do to-day. There are instances of as much as 1000 guineas having

been offered for a horse, and I should doubt if, with the exception of a show hunter—and the show hunter is not the horse we should choose to cross Leicestershire on—many horses have been sold for this sum in our time. All these riders were also determined not to be daunted by any reasonable fence and all were actuated by the same resolution not to be far from hounds. They were fine horsemen and, though they drank more claret and port than we do, they smoked much less, so they may have had the advantage of us in nerve. If the reader will study the pictures of those days, he will see that the riders are drawn as a rule with excellent seats. In the paintings of Alken, Ferneley, Wildrake and other artists of the day, the riders, whether depicted galloping or taking their fences, are all sitting on the right place on their saddles. The horses have light double bridles and have plenty of liberty given them by the rider's hand.

But then, as now, these front rank men were not the only ones who went out hunting in the Shires. We have seen that a visitor from Essex has noted that the gates were then, as they are still in our own day, a temptation to many, so while valour naturally has the largest share of the record, discretion had the greater number of disciples. Some of the latter manage to see a great deal of the good runs and nearly the whole of the inferior ones. In all periods of hunting history the first-rate runs have been few in comparison to the ordinary hunts. It is true that in Leicestershire there are very few days during which, for some few minutes at least, the gallant ones have not opportunities of showing their courage, for, if you make up your mind to ride as near hounds as possible, there are nearly always bright minutes

in a run over the grass. If the fox runs a ring—and for many reasons this often occurs—then he must at all events for some part of his course be running up-wind, and hounds can travel fairly fast against the wind unless the fox is a very long way in front of them.

Hitherto we have drawn our examples from those who aimed at being with hounds, some of them alongside, and others now and then in front of the pack. There is perhaps, if anywhere, more excuse for riding rather too near hounds in Leicestershire than elsewhere. A very hard riding Pytchley man of past days being once reprovèd for pressing on the pack, replied that the crowd during Lord Chesterfield's reign was such that the only place whence a view of hounds could be had was at the very top of the hunt, and that when a check came the following crowd were apt to press him too close to them. But there are many sportsmen who see a good deal and yet seldom jump at all. Possibly these see more than others who pick their places, for, as a Duke of Beaufort once remarked, the man who takes half measures and does not jump everything he comes across, is sure to be pounded and is always likely to be thrown out, whereas the man who jumps not at all cannot by any possibility be stopped.

Two such men there were in the old times who fairly represent those who follow hounds to-day in an unambitious fashion, and yet managed to see much of the fun. Both hunted in Warwickshire, and as this country comes within the scope of this volume, some account of their methods will not be out of place. The first was Mr. Corbet, who belonged to what we may call the galloping section of the skirter. He did not mind how fast he went or over what sort

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of ground he galloped. Now, it is probable that a rider of this sort exchanges an imaginary danger for a real one, as galloping over rough ground and down stony and boggy lanes is more dangerous than jumping fences. No doubt, indeed, the author of "Fifty Years' Fox-hunting" is right when he says, that if a man is mounted on anything of a hunter, to be near to the hounds is the safest place.

Nevertheless, each man has his own ideas as to what he can do best, and, as far as seeing a run is concerned, such riders as Mr. Corbet possibly have a better general idea of the course of a hunt than any except those in the first flight. What they do miss is the working of the pack. The beautiful head hounds carry in the chase, their sudden sweep to keep the scent, the rapid cast forward of their own accord, and the instant recovery of the line—with the drive onward that follows—these delight the man who loves hounds, but cannot well be seen from a quarter of a mile away. Hounds are never more delightful to watch than when they are *hunting* at a fast pace. No doubt there is glory and exaltation in riding to them on the rare occasions when the scent serves and they simply drop their sterns and race straight forward. These days, however, are but few, and the times when even the best of us see them are fewer still.

Such pleasures, then, are not for the skirter, though he may indeed see the slower parts of the hunt, and, if he keeps down-wind, sooner or later on most days hounds will turn to him. If, indeed, they run clean away up-wind he has nothing to do but keep pegging on. A fox that runs up-wind has in most cases a point in view, some favourite covert, some handy refuge in a drain, or maybe a convenient rabbit hole.

The steeplechase—for such the hunt then is—will not last long, and our friend is fairly certain to pick hounds up again. There is, even in such riding as his, no time to lose. He must be first at the gates and he must know the country and have some knowledge of the lie of the coverts and the run of the foxes. Thus an outlying fox, unless he is very hard pressed, almost always goes to the nearest covert, or, if found in the outskirts of a village or town, he will describe a circle or two until he can find leisure to pop into a rabbit hole or drain near his home. Following the pack and watching for a turn—and you can see a long way in Leicestershire—the skirter will ride wide of the line. He is thus bound to keep a keen look-out, or he may head the fox or ride over the line. He will avoid the eye of the master and, like the women of Athens, esteem it his greatest glory to be noticed as little as possible.

Now for our second instance. Mr. Stubbs hunted in Warwickshire from Stratford-on-Avon. His method was to peg along at the same pace, and this he would keep up for twenty miles if the run lasted so long. It was, says Nimrod, “a nice gentleman-like canter of about nine miles in the hour.” The pace at which Mr. Stubbs rode over a country after hounds, indeed, at last became proverbial. “I remember once being too late at covert and the hounds had gone away with their fox; meeting a groom returning with his master’s hack, I asked him whether they had gone away quickly. ‘No, sir,’ said the man, ‘about Mr. Stubbs’ pace.’” Yet, Mr. Stubbs could always describe the run, seldom failed to come up at the finish and was always ready to see a fresh fox found, at any hour, “frequently reminding his brother-huntsmen that there was a moon which

would serve to kill him by." Mr. Stubbs and the trotting fox-hunter of Lincolnshire had, and still have, their disciples, and when we recollect that there are many days when hounds do not travel very fast in pursuit of their fox, such riders, if they have Mr. Stubbs' eye for a country, will see a fair amount of sport in the course of the season.

Both the above methods require, however, a very strict attention to business. Neither class of rider can afford to be left far behind or he will miss the chances that might have been his, and after the meet will seldom see a hound at all.

There is yet one other description of rider to hounds, of whom the type can be found among the riders of the past, the men who hunt with small means and an indifferent steed. The most remarkable of these was a certain Mr. Carrington, once a subaltern in the 15th Hussars, who had but £300 a year and hunted from Melton about the year 1825. Mr. Carrington kept four hunters and a hack. He was not a coper, for he rode low-priced light-weight horses and is said to have made very little by their sale. The way he economised was by being his own stableman. "He has but one man in the stable, actually performing the duties of a groom himself, and is seen at exercise with his horses, as grooms or their helpers are wont to be, and he also actually performs his part of the necessary duties of the stable." I am sorry to say that the Meltonians expressed admiration, but did not ask him to their houses. "When I used to go to Lord Waterford," said Mr. Carrington, "to know about hunting, I went to the back door;" and Mr. Carrington was a good deal touched by the condescension of Lord Gardner, who actually asked him to take wine with him. So far, I think we have

improved, nor would a man, who was otherwise a gentleman and a once popular subaltern in a good regiment, be ostracised for his economies. There are, of course, a certain class of men who might sneer, but these are they whom wealth has raised socially without elevating either their minds or their manners. Such, however, are few among hunting people, for in the hunting-field, as in a public school, men soon find their level. Nowhere perhaps are men more valued for what they are rather than what they have, for wealth, though it has some consequence, has little influence in that most democratic of institutions, the hunting-field.

We have seen what some of the riders of the past were like, though I have touched upon but a few. No word has been said of Lord Gardner, who knew what pace was and could make a horse do anything with his fine hand; of Sir Frederick Johnstone, who was noted for his love of timber and seldom saw a flight of rails without having a fling at them; of Whyte-Melville, who for many years saw much sport with the Pytchley with but moderate horses, and who has recorded his own experiences in "Market Harborough" for those who can read between the lines; of Charles Payn, one of the famous huntsmen of the past; of Colonel Anstruther Thomson, who went through the stiff Pytchley country because his weight forbade that he should ride over it; of Mr. Maher and Mr. Little Gilmour and many others. All, however, are agreed on certain points: to ride slow at timber and aslant at big fences; to avoid riding straight over ridge and furrow; to put on pace for a rasper; to ride steadily, but not too slowly, at their fences; and never to turn their horses' heads from the hounds if they can help it. As I have already

said, a man must ride faster over the fences on the grass than elsewhere, but should never rush, or let his horse out of his hand, if he can help it. For there are moments in a crowd racing for a start when we must take our chance and jump where and how we can if we have a high-couraged horse a little out of hand with excitement, for we know there is the probability of being jumped on if we fall. But that is only for a moment in the first mad race for a start. For the rest, courage, calmness and fine hands, with an eye for country, will take their fortunate possessors to the front—if their horses are good enough—now as they did eighty years ago.

There is an admirable description of such a ride written by a lady well known at Melton, but whose anonymity, though it is an open secret, we must respect. Speaking of her horse she says :—

“I had not gone ten strides before I knew that I could not stop him. My host on receiving the information said, ‘What does it matter? Hounds are running. You surely don’t want to stop him.’ ‘Oh, no, but I cannot guide him.’ ‘That doesn’t matter, they are running straight.’ So, stimulated by this obvious common-sense, I went on in the delirium of the chase till I had jumped so close to an innocent man that my habit-skirt carried off his spur, and, in avoiding a collision at a ford, I jumped the widest brook I have ever seen jumped, and after that I got a pull at him.” Again in Whyte-Melville’s “Riding Recollections” who does not remember where young Rapid and his three friends race for the one practicable spot in a big fence? But all the rush is over in five or ten minutes, and after that there is plenty of room.

There is, however, another difficult moment : if

the first fence is altogether unjumpable and a gate the only outlet, and this perhaps a narrow hunting gate. With the agonising sense that hounds are running farther away every moment, you find yourself in the midst of a too eager throng. You push your way in, hoping that there is not, or that there ought not to be, a bit of red ribbon in the tail of the horse in front. At last your chance comes. You shoot from the muddy gateway into the field and, it may be, are rejoiced to find that the pack has checked in the next field and that there was no hurry after all.

Luckily, in most cases, hounds take a perceptible time to get clear of the covert; ridge and furrow will soon steady the wildest horse that can be ridden at all; and not all fences are impossible. But, with everything in your favour, there will always be four or five who will be alongside hounds when you struggle up. These will nearly always be the same men, for they will have taken a line of their own, a thing which no amount of instruction can make any one able to do. It is, indeed, a combination of a faculty of horsemanship, knowledge of the country, pluck, judgment and experience, together with a good horse that can and will jump not only when, but also where, you want him to do so.

Yet there are places which no one can get through quickly, whatever his qualifications. Such is the bottom between Burton Overy and Carlton Curlieu, and there is another somewhere near Tilton; the Manton brook below Manton Gorse, and the second fence from Glooston Wood on the way to Keythorpe. Some of the bottoms can only be penetrated at one place and then but by a narrow slippery path, with a steep scramble on the far side of the muddy stream.

In some parts an obstacle unjumpable may bring the whole field together at a gateway such as that from Sheepthorns to the pasture nearest to the Kibworth and Tur Langton Roads ; and then, with the best will and judgment in the world, it will take us time to work our way through, unless, indeed, we arrive there with the first half-dozen.

But we must needs do what we can, and fortunately in hunting, as in life, there are more chances than one for most of us, if we have the courage, perseverance and intelligence to take advantage of them.

CHAPTER VIII

A WEEK AT OAKHAM AND A GLIMPSE OF STAMFORD

Rise of Oakham—The Surrounding Country—Monday with the Quorn or Cottesmore—Negotiating the Dykes—Wednesday with the Pytchley or Belvoir—Lord Exeter's proposed new Pack—Thursday with the Cottesmore or Mr. Fernie—Following a Single Pack—Advantages of so doing—Friday with the Quorn—Wardley Wood—The Busy Man—Capping—Stamford—Choice of Several Packs—The Fitzwilliam Hounds.

THE town of Oakham has risen into note as a hunting centre within the last few years. No doubt it was known to many people before that. But it was not until the Cottesmore reached its present height of fame as a hunt that Oakham became fashionable. Though a charming town and situated in the Vale of Catmose, which as a riding ground is not to be surpassed, it must, owing to its limited accommodation, always be select in point of numbers. The town has, including the parish of Barleythorpe, a population of some four thousand souls. It is the very picture of a quiet market-town. It is reached by the Midland in from two hours to two hours and a half by fast trains from St. Pancras and by the G.N.R. from King's Cross. There are generally through carriages, and here, as elsewhere, both railway companies, the Midland and the Great Northern, are careful to consider the wants of hunting men as regards accommodation for both themselves and their horses.

Oakham is the capital of the county of Rutland, the smallest, but one of the best hunted, counties in England. It is a district of strong woods, open pastures, and stout foxes. There is practically little or no wire in the county. The population favour hunting almost to a man, and from the great landowners to the men who work in the fields every one takes pleasure in the chase of the fox. Owing to the fact that the Noels and Lowthers were the founders of the Cottesmore Hunt, the country has had a larger proportion of local men as Masters of the hunt than some of its neighbours. The motives which would lead a stranger to choose Oakham as his headquarters would be a liking for quiet and a taste for hunting as well as riding. As a matter of fact, and putting aside all theories and fancies, those who hunt in Leicestershire are not, in the majority of cases, less fond than others of the working of hounds, but they like riding too. They like to see hounds working quickly. Indeed, just now, fox-hunting may be seen from Oakham in all its phases at its very best. But he who would hunt from Oakham must take time by the forelock and secure his quarters perhaps a year ahead. There are many other people who are aware of its attractions and equally eager to enjoy the sport of which it is the centre. The man, however, who has been fortunate enough to secure a lodging for himself and stables for his horses, which last should be the very best that he can afford, will spend his week as follows. On Monday he will have a choice sometimes, for the Quorn will be not seldom within reach, though it will necessitate a long drive or ride and an early start. Perhaps a horse-box to Melton would be the easier way of reaching hounds. The Cottesmore, however, have

shown such excellent sport of late on a Monday that very many people turn their horses' heads in that direction, bearing in mind that, although there may be a long trot in the morning, yet that the afternoon draw is likely to lead us homeward at night. The Cottesmore hunt in this direction right away to Lincolnshire. On Monday the hounds are often to be found in some of the big woodlands of the north-eastern part of their territory bordering on the Belvoir country. Into the territories of that hunt they not seldom take back a travelling fox that has been driven over the border by the Duke of Rutland's pack. The going is often heavy, and, as the fenland is approached, the man whose horse will not face the big dykes is apt to be left behind. Some of these dykes can be jumped by a bold horse, but in my Lincolnshire days I have seen horses, and notably a clever, well-bred, lop-eared mare belonging to a hard riding young farmer, slip neatly down one side, take a standing leap at the bottom, and scramble up the other. If a horse can and will do this, though it takes time, yet it occupies far less than dragging him out of a dyke with a team of cart horses, after an abortive attempt to fly a drain.

The scent in this part of the country varies a good deal. At times hounds can run very fast and at others they have to work for every foot of ground they cover. When scent is such that hounds can go fast, horses are often reduced to a very steady pace by fields of holding plough or deep woodland rides. Thus the man who goes out simply for a gallop will not as a rule choose this side of the Cottesmore. On the other hand, there are great pleasures in store for those who love hunting, for they will see Thatcher and his dog hounds. This is a very killing pack.

In 1901 they went out twenty-nine consecutive times early in the season and never once missed killing their fox. They are very handy, very full of drive and of a steady perseverance worthy of all admiration. There are often large gatherings on a Cottesmore Monday but never an overwhelming crowd. Even if there were, the big woods, the plough where it occurs and the ditches would soon spread it out and thin it down to manageable dimensions. It may well be imagined, then, in the case of a pack which is accustomed to drill its foxes and be drilled itself in the woods, that, although the coverts may be large, yet no undue time is wasted. Besides, a travelling fox may have come from the Melton side of the country, and so you may find yourself not seldom beginning the day in the woods, but finishing it over the best of grass. You may start in characteristic Lincolnshire surroundings, but finish over a typical Leicestershire country. When such an event does happen, it is likely to be one of the runs of the season. Of Tuesday I have no need to write, for on that day and probably on Friday the men of Oakham will find themselves meeting the Melton division, and the destinations of travellers from both towns will be the same. On Wednesday the Oakham man will either take a day off or go by train to swell the Pytchley crowd or will (and this is the most likely course) join the Belvoir in that Wednesday country of which I have written already. Thursday is a day when interests are sometimes divided, for, while no one would dream of missing a fixture in the Market Overton country, yet on that day hounds are sometimes to be found in the less popular district bordering on the Fitzwilliam Hunt in the country which some years ago used to be the Wednesday country.

The fact is that this part of the Cottesmore would be even better than it is—and the same is true of the eastern side—if it were hunted more. Lord Exeter, whose residence at Burleigh House has been marked by an immense improvement in the sport in his neighbourhood with both the Cottesmore and the Fitzwilliam, is now anxious to start a pack to hunt the eastern district, which, if not now exactly neglected, is nevertheless inadequately hunted, both for the sake of the education of the foxes and in the interests of the inhabitants. It is perhaps hardly necessary to say that the establishment of this pack would add to the hunting attractions of both Stamford and Oakham and would improve the sport in this eastern side of the Cottesmore.

The counter-attraction to the Cottesmore on a Thursday for those who do not come into the Shires to hunt over plough or through woodlands is Mr. Fernie's Thursday fixture. The admirable country round Keythorpe, Skeffington, Goadby and Rolleston is well within reach on that day. Mr. Fernie's hounds will certainly give a gallop. There is no pack with which some good sport is more a certainty. But some men prefer, when they have settled themselves in the centre of a hunting country, to follow the fortunes of a single pack. The truest pleasure is to be found in this. After a time we begin to know some at least of the best working hounds by sight. When we see these hounds leading, we know that all is well. When, after a check, they feather, we are sure that we are about to take up the thread of the sport again. If we have an ear for hound's voices, we recognise the notes of certain trusty ones among them. Altogether we begin to take a close and more intelligent interest in the pack of our choice,

and to exchange the feverish anticipation of our personal share in the sport for an observation of the doings of "our hounds" and "our huntsman." Directly we are able to do this, and yet not to become slow in a quick thing, we had better hunt every day we can and make our days as long as possible. Our enjoyment of hunting is at its zenith and we shall never have a better time. It so often happens that while we can still ride hard, we do not understand the science of hunting; and when we have learned that, we can no longer ride near enough to enjoy it. But if it be our happy state to be able to do both, we shall be less fastidious about country and take our pleasure with the Cottesmore on Thursday wherever they may be. On Friday the Oakham visitor will find the Quorn the most convenient pack to meet.

Of Saturday I have already written, and this last it may very well happen will be the very best day of the whole week. It can scarcely fail to be full of interest to the sportsman. It is one of the undoubted advantages that Oakham possesses over other centres that it is an easy ride from Wardley Wood and the surrounding country. I have heard this covert called by an enthusiastic and experienced sportsman the best in the whole district. But, while all is so good that it seems needless to compare, yet I agree that Wardley and Stoke are in a delightful corner of the hunt. Many a time have I left nearer fixtures and trotted ten or twelve miles only to see this wood drawn by the Cottesmore, and to follow, if so it might be, a hunt over the charming country round about. We may also note that Oakham is a peculiarly suitable place for the busy man who can give only one or two days a week to the

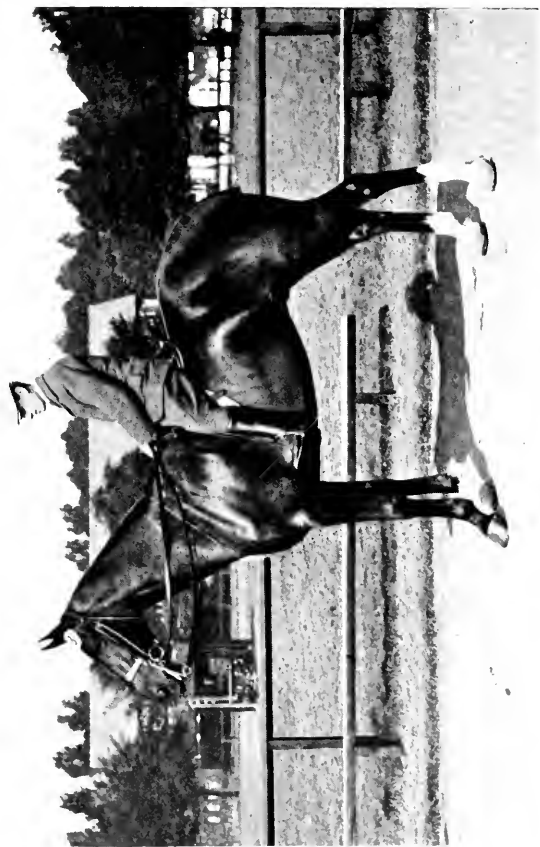
sport. The less often we can hunt, the more we need that the quality of the sport should be of the best on those days that we can spare. Business men who are in a position to hunt from Oakham can generally spare Saturday, not seldom Friday as well, and sometimes Monday. Now, from Oakham these three days may all be enjoyed in the fairest country of the Cottesmore and the Quorn. Then the leisure which Christmas, and sometimes an early Easter, bring to the worker will certainly be spent as pleasantly here as elsewhere. Even the busiest man who can afford time to hunt at all will have more for his money. For him the capping arrangement will be convenient and perhaps economical. He pays strictly for what he has and, should he be unlucky in the matter of frosts and of a frugal mind, as perhaps a business man ought to be, he will, taking one season with another, under the new arrangement of a £2 cap find himself free of obligations to the hunt for his sport at a comparatively moderate expense.

There is, however, another place that can hardly be omitted from our list of hunting centres, though it lies very wide of the best country. This place is Stamford, which has some advantages over Oakham for the man who can pay only flying visits, in that it offers more hotel accommodation for the casual visitor. It is also an ancient and pleasant town. Stamford is about twenty miles from Melton and about ten from Oakham, and is directly connected with Market Harborough by rail. In the old coaching days it was more of a hunting centre than it is now, owing to its situation on one of the best-known routes. But if the Marquis of Exeter's hounds become an established fact, as may be well the case before this book is in the hands of the public, then

Stamford will have an additional interest for hunting men. Even now there are the Cottesmore hounds, the Fitzwilliam and Lord Exeter's harriers. The Fitzwilliam are one of the great historic packs. The strains of "the Milton" are in all the famous kennels of England, and they rank with the Belvoir and the Brocklesby as among those packs to which the modern fox-hound traces his pedigree. Then the Woodland Pytchley are well within reach at times, so that the hunting man might employ his time very satisfactorily. There is one respect in which the Fitzwilliam are unrivalled, and that is in the music of the pack. "Every hound threw his tongue at the top of his voice" was the description given me of them by a Leicestershire man noted for hard riding, as well as for his love of the chase in all its many phases. Coming as he did from a rather silent pack, he told me the contrast was delightful. Plenty of tongue is also needful if we are thoroughly to enjoy hunting round Stamford, for much of our time must be spent in big coverts, and there is surely no pleasure in hunting unless you know where the hounds are. Fortunately, too, the coverts are in the hands of men who love hunting, and Lord Exeter, at Stamford, and Mr. J. Hornsby, at Laxton Park, are determined to have foxes both numerous and (what is of more importance) wild. So well supplied are these coverts that, though the Cottesmore and the Fitzwilliam both draw them, Mr. Fitzwilliam was able to invite Mr. Fernie to have a day or two in the autumn and spring of 1902-3, and to give his hounds some of the woodland work which Mr. Fernie is unable to do in his own beautiful country. Stamford has an excellent train service from King's Cross and St. Pancras. The journey occupies from two hours and a quarter

to two hours and three quarters by quick trains, and, if you halt at Peterborough, you will be able to visit the famous kennels of the Fitzwilliam at Milton, which are only about two and a half miles distant. There you will see a pack which, in spite of the admixture of other blood, like all our famous family packs, has a marked character of its own. It seems as though the notable men who have had to do with these great kennels had given to the race of hounds an individuality of their own. The Belvoir, the Brocklesby, the Badminton, the Fitzwilliam, the Warwickshire are to a certain extent akin, but typical hounds from each kennel have an unmistakable stamp. Thus, the long, beautiful, springy neck, the combination of lightness and strength, and the large but not heavy and very intelligent head of the Fitzwilliam hounds are notable. Nor do I think it would be possible to mistake a Fitzwilliam hound whenever you saw him. I do not know that their standard is much higher in inches than that of any other pack, but it is certain that they look large, perhaps owing to the appearance of speed and power. The present master, Mr. Fitzwilliam, and Barnard, his huntsman, take the greatest interest in keeping up the standard. I have noted above that every great pack is the result of the work and judgment of one or more able huntsmen, and in the case of the Fitzwilliam the name of Sebright is most closely identified with the founding, and that of G. Carter with the later days, of the pack. The history of the Fitzwilliam pack and its origin is that it was founded on a blending of judicious mating with Brocklesby, Beaufort, and Belvoir blood, and suited to the country by a man who was well able to select his hounds right and fit them for the country they had to hunt

over. “*The dam is the thing*” (the secret of breeding in a nutshell) was Tom Sebright’s guiding principle. Like all great hound-breeders, he was a good huntsman in the field and probably one of the very best who ever blew a horn (which he was not over fond of doing) in a big strong covert. The elders have told me that his hounds loved him and would fly to a touch on the horn or to his cheer. But we must not dwell on a hunt which is not within our limits, save for an occasional visit for the sake of finding ourselves on historic ground. It has only been included to give completeness to the information in this chapter.



From a photograph by Lafayette, London

A WELL-KNOWN WEIGHT CARRIER

CHAPTER IX

THE HORSE FOR THE GRASS COUNTRIES

Intelligence of the Horse—Extreme Views—Breeding Hunters—Young Horses *versus* Old—The Day's Routine—Irish and Arab—The Right Horse for Leicestershire—Care of the Horse—Osbaldeston's "Cannon Ball"—A Description by Nimrod—Beauty and Strength—Big Horses the Best—Buying and Selling—Educating.

THE objects of this chapter are sternly practical. In it we shall occupy ourselves only with the subject of horses to ride over the Midlands. I shall make no attempt to describe an ideal Leicestershire horse. There is, indeed, no one type of horse which is suitable for every one, though there are of course certain points and qualities which we cannot do without. It is my object to find out what these are, and to this end I have gathered a number of particular instances, from which we shall find that, important as physical qualities are to a hunter, these are useless without those which we cannot call by any other name than mental gifts.

It used to be the fashion with writers to eulogise the intelligence of the horse and possibly to exaggerate it. Nowadays it is rather the custom to depreciate the mental powers of the horse, to call him stupid and even senseless; and the drivers of motor-cars desire to make out that he is a kind of machine, of which the boilers are always out of order and on

which the levers refuse to act. The fact is that it is as impossible to generalise about the intelligence of horses as about that of men. In both cases, however, we find after examining a number of cases that there is a sort of average of mental power, which may be counted on, and of stupidity, which must be reckoned with. In the horse, and more particularly in the hunter with which we are at present specially concerned, this average intelligence is increased by the influence of education and of heredity.

I am not prepared to dogmatise about horse breeding in general or hunter breeding in particular, but on one point I am quite clear, and that is that, if we desire excellence in any particular quality, we must breed from parents which have a record of performances in the line we desire. I am sure that hunters should be bred from thoroughbred or half-bred sires which have won races or steeplechases, or at least run in such form as to prove their staying power and their courage, and from mares with a satisfactory record in the hunting field. We shall find, when we look back over the long string of horses that must have passed through the hands of any man who devotes his leisure to hunting and riding, that the variety of the intelligence of horses is as great as that of their make and shape, but that of both there is an irreducible minimum, without which there cannot be a hunter. The mental gifts, however, are indispensable, for I have known horses poorly shaped, at all events to the eye, to go well over a country, but I never knew a really stupid, silly, cowardly, or sour-tempered horse that was a safe conveyance.

In looking back over the very many horses I have ridden, those that stand out in memory as of ex-

traordinary excellence were all animals of considerable intelligence within the limits of a horse's mind. And here I have a suggestion to offer to horse owners, and particularly to those who have large studs of hunters. I think it must have occurred to many men that young horses are more intelligent than older ones. Dick Christian has noted it in his own quaint and forcible style: "If they" (the old horses) "get into difficulties, blame me, they won't try to get out. They haven't the animation of a young horse. Those young 'uns will still try to struggle themselves right." But it certainly ought to be the other way, and indeed, with horses properly treated, it is so.

Our treatment of horses is not such as is likely either to develop their minds or to make the best of such intelligence as they have by nature. In a large stud a horse spends a very small portion of his time in the hunting field and the rest in his loose-box or at exercise. He seldom sees or hears anything, and his life is monotonous in the extreme. If you ride about the roads round Market Harborough or Melton you will admire the magnificent grass sidings on either side of the well-kept roads. If you look more closely at these you will see that they are, by the beginning of the hunting season, scored by a number of narrow footpaths running in parallel lines. These are trodden out by the hunters at their daily exercise. Day after day the same weary round is followed by the strings of horses, generally at an early hour when they are unlikely to meet much on the road. Their lives are thus dull and monotonous to a degree, and it is small wonder if, like a man suddenly plunged from solitude into society, they do foolish things when they find them-

selves in the bustle and crowd of the hunting field. I am strongly of opinion that many bad falls would be prevented if horses were treated in a more rational manner. The plan of turning hunters out to grass in the summer is bad for their wind and for their legs, but it is better for their minds than the dull sameness of the moss-littered box and the everlasting round on an oft-trodden road. With every want cared for, with his bodily powers kept at the highest point of health and condition, what outlet has a hunter for his mental activities? In a wild, or semi-wild, state the struggle for existence is still a school for the mind, a stimulus to courage or cunning. A man with a neglected intelligence becomes stupid or develops faults or vices. Why, then, should we be astonished when horses show the same tendency?

The stupidity of the horse is often only the reflection of the limited intelligence of the man under whose care and in whose power he is. Nor is it fair to blame grooms as a class; they are not seldom very intelligent men, but they cannot escape any more than the rest of us from the traditions of their occupation and the habits of their life. The master may be more intelligent than the man, but he acquiesces, whether through indolence or thoughtlessness, in the old routine.

We often see it stated in books, or hear it said in the horse talk which is so common that we may be surprised it does not result in better management, that Irish horses with Arab blood or those descended from pony ancestors make the best hunters. Is not this simply because they are nearer to the time when the horse had to use his own wits? The Irish colt, the Arab horse, and the hill pony all have to learn to take care of themselves, and they use

their wits to save their necks and incidentally those of their riders. Every one knows how quickly Irish horses learn our Leicestershire fences. They are apt to drop their hind-quarters into them at first, feeling possibly for the familiar banks, but after a fall or two, seldom serious, they understand exactly how to manage. Some years ago I bought in Ireland a mare which was so much in the rough that oats were to her a novelty. There was no mistaking her cleverness when she was tried over the fences of her native country. During the two seasons I rode her in England she gave me one fall, dropping her hind-legs on to a rotten bank in the Surrey Union Country and rolling over into the next field. The lesson was never forgotten. About the same time, or a little later, I had an ex-steeplechase horse. He had been admirably schooled, and, if you rode him straight and hounds went fast, he would stride over his fences in grand style, but he was a horse without resources, and, if you asked him to go slowly at a gap, to creep through an awkward bottom, or to jump out of a road, he was as likely as not to give you a fall. He was an old horse, and the mind had been drilled and droned out of him.

For all practical purposes such a horse is useless in Leicestershire, where above all things you require a made hunter. You may ride a run which is straight and fast like a steeplechase once or twice in a month, but you will probably see a hunt every day you go out. On the horses with wits you may see everything; on the other class of horse you must wait your chance and then, when hounds are running hard, catch him by the head and send him along, trusting in the extraordinary reserve of power that a blood horse has, and a little too to the chapter of

accidents, to bring you safely to the end. "How do you ride over such big places at your age?" was asked of a gallant old farmer who bred and rode for sale. "Well, sir, nowadays when I comes to a very big place I shuts my eyes, trusts a little in Providence, and leaves a deal to the horse." And this is what the rider of such a horse must do, at all events as to the latter part of the advice.

It is from horses of this class that we often have our worst falls. They are easy and pleasant to ride when everything goes right, and a bold man who will sit still may often distinguish himself in a burst, which fills the rider with a misplaced confidence. But the downfall, when it does come, is generally a bad one, and sooner or later is bound to happen. Therefore I suggest that it is well to consider and to train the minds as well as the bodies of our horses. In Leicestershire a horse must be fit, or he is practically useless. He has to gallop up and down steep hills and to jump forty or fifty more or less stiff fences, and all this at a pace which is often not very much slower than is required of a chaser. But we also want the horse to have his wits about him. Every one who has ridden to hounds for any length of time must, I think, realise with increasing certainty how little the rider can do to help his horse.

To sit still and leave his head free is the secret of few falls, and those few comparatively harmless. Of these the following is an example direct from the practice of one of the greatest huntsmen of our day. "Afterwards Lord Willoughby left his horses' heads much more alone and went much slower at his fences. This was, no doubt, the secret and the reason why he had so few falls and so few bad ones. He rode chiefly by balance, but at the same time

was very secure. He leaned back a good deal at his leaps, so was seldom unseated and always gave his horses plenty of rope at the jumps." * Now, this is undoubtedly the right way, but it presupposes that the horse can take care of himself. It will be found that all the greatest riders to hounds adopted the same methods, but they almost always either bought good horses or made them.

A horse that was stupid by nature or training would have beaten even such horsemen as Lord Willoughby, and indeed he had at least one horse he could not ride; and everybody else would tell the same tale if their experiences were written down. Some horses, no doubt, like some men, are fools by nature, but many of both are made so by bad training. Now, I am not going to suggest any far-fetched methods of educating a horse. I believe in school training for the hunter as well as the charger or the hack, and I am sure that good results come from taking notice of your horses in the stable and speaking to them gently both out of doors and in. I have a habit myself, which I believe in greatly as establishing a good understanding between the horses and their owner. During the hunting season my horses have a feed at ten P.M. This I generally give myself, taking a stable lantern and the key and going round and feeding each horse and speaking to him when the stable is quiet. This may be merely a fad, and many people would not take the trouble about it; but I am firmly convinced that it has made some eager, excitable horses much pleasanter to ride.

But, putting on one side such fanciful practices, I believe greatly in a man hacking his hunters him-

* "Lord Willoughby de Broke: In Memoriam." *Baily's Magazine*, 1903, p. 198.

self if he lives in the country and in endeavouring to prevent the horses being taken the same round and on the dulllest roads every day. I have known several men who drove their horses in harness, and I can see no objection in practice, though in theory of course it is objectionable. One friend takes them in the coach as leaders, and this is to my mind an ideal way for a hunter to spend his summer, provided his legs and feet are sound and healthy. If he has these, I am sure that by moderate work he is much more likely to keep them so than in a grass park or a moss-littered box. But even if I had to put the hunters in a brougham or a four-wheeled dogcart—I confess I do not like two-wheeled vehicles for riding horses—I would rather face the disadvantages of this than allow the horse to become dull and stupid in his box. To give as much change and variety, to let the horse see as many different sights and sounds as possible, is more important than almost anything else.

The point which comes next is to consider what kind of horse ought to be found in our studs in the grass countries. Here I shrink from laying down any rules. Not only do horses defy the dogmatist by showing most unexpected qualities, but so much depends on the man. It is well, then, to take counsel with ourselves in solitude when we can afford to be quite honest and perfectly frank, and to consider what sort of horse we are really able to ride with pleasure and comfort. That is the first point to consider. We may not, very likely we shall not, be able to find exactly what we want, but at any rate we are more likely to do so if we have the Type clearly before our minds.

The next points to consider are what we can afford

to pay and how many horses we can keep. These are most important matters to a man who is thinking of a season in the Shires, for on the determination he comes to with regard to them will depend in all probability not only the place he selects to go to, but the amount of pleasure he will have when the serious business of hunting really begins. We will take these three points in order, and on our decision as to the kind of horse we want, or perhaps, to be more accurate, on the sort of horse we can ride, will depend in part the decision come to on the other points.

As we have no occasion to make-believe, the first thing is to take stock of our own capacities as a horseman. Here we may consider not only what we can do when fairly well mounted, but what experience we have had. For, without long practice in the hunting field, the faculty of taking not so much one's own line across country as the best and most effective line, is likely to be absent, and so is the rider during the greater part of the run. If, however, a man has hunted all his life, from the day when he scrambled about on a rough pony to the time when he contemplated a season in the Shires, and if he can honestly say that no matter in what provincial country he has hunted he has generally been able to see the greater part of most good runs, he need not be afraid. He will be soon able to find his way across Leicestershire as across his native fallow. Nor is it necessary to have learned horsemanship in the hunting field, for I have noted that men, like those from the colonies, accustomed to the saddle generally ride well over the grass.

If, then, we have the skill and the experience, the best kind of horse is a big, bold, well-bred animal who will go where he is put without a lead. I say a big

horse, because in the Shires I think a good big horse is better than a good little one. Upstanding horses of 16.1-16.2 are the best, and I have known 17-hand horses which rode, as the saying is, like a pony. Size, courage, and a fairly good temper are all we need look to unless we are millionaires. "Handsome is as handsome does" is an excellent motto for the horse buyer who has to consider his purse. Many good horses are rather plain to look at. Read the following description of a certain horse called Ferryman, which saw out the first and second horses in a great run in Northamptonshire. "He was a coarse, ugly, ragged-hipped chestnut horse, a very plain head, lean and long but beautifully hung on, as we say, to his neck, and with rather a Roman nose. Shoulders nearly perpendicular in front, but at the same time running far enough into the chine to come under the denomination of lengthy ones. A very long shank bone with long elastic pasterns, a long back with an indifferent spur place, though not exactly light in his carcase; quarters good, hocks lean and hind legs well bent under him." Now this horse had a great many good points. His shoulders indeed were not those which the late Lord Willoughby said were a luxury for the rich, but he could use them or he could not, as he did, have jumped a stiff stile out of deep ground at the end of a long day. Note too the long pasterns, and we shall not be surprised to learn that he was "the smoothest galloper over ridge and furrow I ever rode in my life."

There is a point which is not mentioned in the above description, but which is of the greatest importance. Some of the best, and all the pleasantest, hunters I have ever ridden have been rather narrow between one's legs, but deep through the heart, and, for grass countries, I should say look out for depth rather than

width. It may be recollected, too, that a horse which looks narrow and light will nevertheless gallop satisfactorily under a considerable weight if he is deep enough through the heart. For Leicestershire I do not dislike a horse with a small head, provided the eye is good and the head has "plenty of meaning in it." Yet in buying horses it is a mistake to be so set on one point, be it shoulders, or depth, or even the expression of the head and the full eye, important as these are, as to refuse a horse absolutely because of some falling off from our ideal. Hunting is not like polo, for in choosing ponies for that game we must remember there are some points without which it is a physical impossibility that a pony should be a good one. With hunters, on the other hand, we can overlook a great deal.

We all know the story of Osbaldeston's famous little Cannon Ball horse, which was rejected by the Melton hard riders.

"A sweet horse, but has not length enough for Leicestershire," said one; while another brought his tape out and observed that the horse was a mere weed. The same day, during a run after a straight-necked Owston Wood fox, the weed jumped six gates in succession and went to the Squire for 200 guineas. Here is another description from Nimrod of a horse named Spring, which he considers to have been the best he ever had. "His head was long with rather a narrow and somewhat convex forehead, expressive of anything but good temper, a very small muzzle the colour of a hazel nut, and not large nostrils; but his jaw bones were remarkably far apart and *the setting on of his head and the form of his neck* were perfect. *He was not wide between my legs, but the depth and extreme declivity of his shoulders* were such as to give his rider unbounded confidence in his strength of forehand in

all his paces, and on all trying occasions. No part of his frame was wide but there was a little rise behind the saddle, or more properly speaking in the loins, the effect of which was powerfully felt by his rider. His quarters were rather short but his thighs long and muscular and his hocks fit for models. He had the *knee of a wagon horse, a very small shankbone but a large leg to span*, and no day's work appeared to make the slightest impression on his legs, which from his standing over at the knee were always on the totter in the stable." The writer goes on to say that he had remarkably long fetlocks, to which he says, rightly, was to be attributed his very springy action as well as power in dirt. I have myself a great liking for long pasterns, even so long as to be regarded as weak, and an equal prejudice for work in the grass countries against pasterns in the least degree short and upright. I believe that long pasterns, from the ease and spring that they give to the action, are among the points that contribute to the staying power.

But to return to Spring, I cannot imagine a better description, not indeed of an ideal, but of a likely Leicestershire hunter. I have italicised the points which made him what he was, and the reader will note those which might have caused a man who bought his horses by the look to turn away from him. His performances were notable ; no fence came amiss to him. He would refuse nothing he was ridden at and would do his best to get over it. Of his power of endurance we read that on one occasion, after having spent twenty minutes in the Cherwell and being nearly drowned, his master, with small credit to his humanity, rode him for a beautiful burst of eight or ten miles, "Spring going as if nothing had happened." He was an upstanding horse of about 15.3.

It is in fact advisable to discard all prejudices and as a rule to turn a deaf ear to advice when buying a horse for Leicestershire. If a horse has a character, and you can ride him, he is worth a trial. Every one who buys horses must sometimes make mistakes. If, however, a horse is otherwise a good one, though he does not cross the country quite to your satisfaction, it is well to take into consideration the horsemanship of his previous owner, for there are very few horses that can pretend to gallop or jump over Leicestershire that cannot be improved in the hands of a straight and bold rider. This, of course, would be a truism if I were referring to fine horsemanship, but I am now writing only of the will and the power to send a horse along. If my reader can do this, he may be sure that horses, otherwise fair, will improve in his possession.

A man never knows what a horse can do until he really tests him. There is an excellent illustration of this in the story of the way the famous Dicky Bayzand made a hunter of Nimrod's red-legged mare in an hour. (She was a beautiful grey on a black skin, with one bright chestnut hinder leg and thigh, quite up to the stifle.) "With a skinful of wine we turned out about six o'clock in the evening of one of the last days in April to wind our way homewards not by the road, but as the crow flies, over that stiff vale between Tenbury and Ludlow, and there and then the education of the red-legged was completed. So straightforward and so fearlessly did Dicky Bayzand put her along—no finer horseman than he was, but shy of unmade ones when sober—that she never offered to refuse another fence, and I afterwards called her a hunter." *

It will be seen, then, that beauty by no means has

* *Sporting Review*, 1840.

the first place in the choice of a Leicestershire hunter. Indeed, when we see combined in one animal not merely the necessary points, the strength, the endurance and the speed combined with good looks, such a horse is apt to find a career in the show yard and to be lost to the hunting field. Horses, for example, like Mr. Cory's Gendarme, Sir Humphrey de Trafford's Brampton and Red Cloud would naturally be ridden with care and saved for the ring. If, when their show career was over, they should be put to hunting, they might easily be beaten in the field by horses that would stand no chance with them in the show ring. This fact—and fact it is—has really no bearing on the utility of horse shows, on the soundness or unsoundness of the judgment of the judges, or even on the actual merits of the horses in question. It is quite right, if horse shows are to do their legitimate work, that a horse should be shown in top condition and with a bloom on him. The horse show is not intended as a competition for actual performances, but to set before breeders and dealers a living picture of the ideal hunter, a type or standard at which we ought to aim.

It is quite true that, as I have written above, it would be foolish to reject a horse because he was rather plain. But a horse is none the better for being ugly; indeed the ugliness is so far a sign of defects. The plain, or ugly, horse lacks that perfect symmetry which, in animals at least, often goes with consummate powers. To say that show horses are often of no use in the field is nothing to the purpose. The horse has been kept in lavender for the show yard and he lacks the experience in crossing a country which is as necessary to a horse as it is to his rider, if either are to become first-rate performers. It is very evident that a good hunter is always learning to measure his leaps,

to economise his strength, and to ensure his safety. Compare the way the good, but inexperienced, horse bounds over a two-foot drain with the almost imperceptible way in which a trained hunter will glide over a fence, measuring the effort to a hair's breadth. But no horse that has spent his life cantering round the show ring can have the experience necessary to do this any more than a man could all at once take a line over Leicestershire who had, with whatever grace of seat or delicacy of hand, never ridden anywhere save in Hyde Park. We shall therefore, in looking for horses, look beyond mere beauty and avoid flat catchers if possible.

I have said, and I believe with truth, that for a man who wishes to cross Leicestershire in the front rank, a big horse is better than a little one. But if you cannot find, as you very likely will not, a good big horse, why then a good little one is not to be despised. Naturally, little horses of excellence are commoner than big ones, and though I think on the whole that the majority of men who ride would agree with what is said above, yet I know that there are some people who prefer smaller horses. Nor in looking over a horse must we be guided by the eye alone, for a very true shaped horse often looks much smaller than he really is. There have been some very famous little horses too, such as Lord Howth's, The Slug, which was barely fifteen hands. He won many chases in Ireland, carried Lord Howth over the Belvoir country, was the only horse to jump the Smite at the end of a long day, and was for some time alone with hounds at the close of a hard run. Though he was so small, he stood over a great deal of ground. That is to say, he was a big horse on short legs, not at all a bad combination for a hunter.

Nevertheless, in spite of the fact that many small horses have gone well over Leicestershire, and with suitable weights even ponies of polo height have distinguished themselves, yet I think that a hard rider can never hold that commanding position in a run on a small horse, however good, that he can on a big one. The lesser animal must screw through some fences and creep where the big horse can stride or crash through. Both may jump a big place in good style and land safely, yet the little horse has necessarily taken a great deal more out of himself in the effort. On the other hand, it may be argued with justice that the smaller horses often stay better than the big ones and that, as a rule, they come round again sooner after a hard day. Other things being equal, then, the smaller horses will give you more hunting than the larger ones. I knew well a most brilliant horse, a big, tall, rather narrow animal, that was a most perfect ride in fast gallops with the Quorn, with which he was hunted. But he could not be depended on to come out more than about once a fortnight if he had had anything like a hard day. On the other hand, I have known small horses that would do a fair day's work twice a week and seem none the worse for it.

Even in Leicestershire, for a man who does not mean to ride quite in front but who wishes to see a great deal of sport with a small stud, smaller horses will enable him to go out more often in proportion to the size of his stud than big ones. This question is to a certain extent independent of weight, for I notice that first-flight men and women, even though comparatively light weights, ride as a rule big, well-bred horses up to about fourteen stone to look at. Mr. Tailby is a noted instance of a light weight who always rode big horses, and most of my Leicestershire

readers will note that big upstanding horses find favour with some of the most brilliant of the ladies who ride to hounds in the grass countries. If, however, a man or woman hunting in the Shires does not mean to take the country as it comes, but to make a way over it by a gate here, a gap there, or a jump when the fences are of ordinary compass, then a small, quick, handy horse will be at once the pleasantest and the most effective mount.

As we grow heavier we shall find out that a horse's power of carrying weight is by no means in proportion to his inches. But there is one thing that seems to me to be quite clear, and this is that, big or little, the horses should be as good as possible. While I do not for a moment question the fact that bargains have been picked up and that good horses have been bought for little money, I do not think that in these days of great demand and moderate supply, horses with anything like the power and quality for Leicestershire can often be bought cheaply. The majority of people have only a certain sum available for the purchase of horses, and this will bring more pleasure and satisfaction if it is laid out on a few really good horses than on a larger number of indifferent ones. It is better surely to hunt more seldom, but to have a reasonable chance of seeing the sport, than to go out every day and seldom see a moderate hunt to our satisfaction and never a good one at all except from a back seat.

Quality rather than quantity must be the motto of the man who would enjoy his season in the Shires. In the same way it is wise for the ordinary man to keep a good horse when he has one. "I will give you 400 guineas for your horse," said a rich man and a good judge to a younger one who had been well carried.

“Thank you,” was the answer, “but if he is worth 400 to buy, he is worth keeping to ride.” There are men who are obliged to sell when they have the chance, but it is not the best plan, even for the fine riders. Of course if a man uses his pluck and skill in horsemanship to diminish his expenses, there is nothing to be said. But the ordinary person will not make much money, and is very likely to lame his horses and to break at least his collar-bone if he pursues the will-o'-the-wisp of coping in the hunting field. The sport, as much sport as possible and nothing else, should be the standard set before himself by the man who would really enjoy his hunting. When we consider the charm of the sport and the comparatively small amount of it that we can enjoy in an ordinary lifetime, it seems hardly worth while to waste our energies on buying and selling horses, at which game the professional will always beat us. I cannot think that a certain noble duke was wise when he said, “I will buy no more made horses. I am young enough to make my own, and I will do so.” There is, no doubt, a pleasure in making horses, but there are very many who can ride a made horse creditably who only spoil their horses and their own riding when they try to school hunters for themselves.

I do not deny that there is a great pleasure in making a hunter out of a raw four-year-old, and a still greater in riding one that we have schooled ourselves, but this is not for the majority, at least until horsemanship, as compared with fair riding, is much commoner than it is at the present time. Many men never climb into a saddle between one hunting season and another, and first-rate riding is one of those things that need constant practice. Nowadays, it is true, the game of polo does much to raise the average of

horsemanship, especially among the younger men. The game perfects the balance, gives freedom to the body, teaches us (sometimes) to have a light hand, and makes a man sit close yet easily in his saddle. As Dick Christian said, it “makes them set at liberty on a horse. A man’s body should be all loose but he should be firm in his thigh. You shouldn’t be able to see under ’em when you’re behind ’em.” There is the polo and the hunting seat in a nutshell !

CHAPTER X

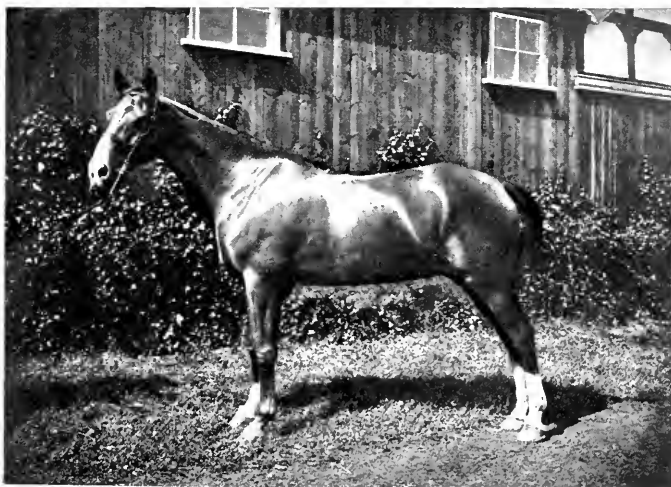
THE HORSE FOR THE GRASS COUNTRIES (*continued*)

Performance and Pedigree—Shape—Mares—Necessary Qualities for Leicestershire—Fences—Where to Buy—The Right Breed—Yorkshire—Cheshire—Leicestershire—Arabs—Dealers—Judging a Horse—Prices—Care in Choosing.

II

THERE are two considerations of importance in choosing a horse on which to ride across Leicestershire that I should put before anything else. First, the animal's own performances, for you are naturally not coming to Melton or Harborough to ride unmade horses ; and secondly, if you have to buy a horse without seeing him in the field or having a trial, do not take one that has not a pedigree with some racing or hunting names in it. But supposing that you see a horse that you like in the summer, when the opportunities of trying him over a country are limited—never mind about trials over made-up fences, I have known many bad hunters to perform exceedingly well over artificial jumps—the best test is to take a horse on to a ridge and furrow pasture on a hill side and walk, trot and canter him up and down the crossway of the furrows. This ought to tell you a great deal about him, more indeed than any other one test can possibly do.

If I were asked to buy a horse from one point only, or perhaps it would be more sensible to say, were I



From a photograph by T. Prichard, Newport, Mon.

A TYPICAL HORSE



A BRILLIANT PERFORMER

asked which point of a horse I consider indispensable to a Leicestershire hunter, I should answer the way the head and neck are put on to the shoulders. I have seldom known a first-rate horse without the long neck well set on, springing elegantly (there is no better word) from the shoulders and joining gracefully to the throat ; and if to this a long, lean, sensible head is attached, the chances are you have a good horse. As to shoulders, the only safe thing to say is that you can know nothing about them till you sit behind them and know whether the horse can use them or not. Indeed, with the exception of the neck and head, we have only to think of other points, and a cloud of exceptions will rise up before the mind of horses apparently defective yet really excellent.

There are, in fact, many things, to which we should object in the show ring, which are ensured by and compensated for by other excellences. For example, there is the old question of large or small feet, yet one of the best mares that I ever rode had notably small feet. In regard to this point, it may be said that in Leicestershire, and especially High Leicestershire, in most years we are going on the top of the ground. Then I like mares, and, though some people have a prejudice against them, I think they are mistaken unless they themselves or their grooms have a pain in their tempers. Mares will not stand knocking about, either in or out of the stable ; but gentle, kindly usage is absolutely necessary in their case as it is, of course, advisable with all horses. But, as I look back over the past and the memory pictures of the favourites of those times stand out, the majority of them are mares. There was the chestnut mare, never sick or sorrow, that carried an undergraduate with the Bicester and the Heythrop, never turned her honest

head from a fence, and never seemed weary or unwilling when hounds ran. There was the first polo pony that never refused to go into a scrimmage or to go up to the ball ; could run leader or tandem ; do a day with hounds ; or win a galloway race as required ; and was a hack that trod on air. There was a stolid mare from Ireland, that never made but one mistake, never jumped an inch higher than need be nor wasted her strength, but whom no double in the Vale of Aylesbury could daunt. There was the Irish cob, who hunted on a plough country every Monday for a season, was never far from hounds, and seldom had less than sixteen miles home at night. There was Grey Miranda, sweetest of polo ponies and keenest of leaders in a tandem. At her own pace, a hard canter, which people said was a gallop, she was hard to beat as a leader. Many more there are, which I have almost forgotten, but which did their work honestly and passed away. It was and is, however, the mares that leave the brightest recollections of past pleasures with them. Nor do I doubt that this passage will stir up many a memory in the minds of readers of this book.

Now we have arrived at this point that, while to describe a Leicestershire hunter is impossible, as any one will see who goes to a meet and notes the variety of horses assembled there, there are certain qualities without which a horse is useless in that country. In the first place, he must be fast. This is a pitfall into which many of us have fallen in the past, and which will entrap many more men in the future, for people do not realise how fast hounds travel on the grass with an even moderate scent nor how very much faster they go than in countries where the average pace is reduced at not infrequent intervals by ploughed fields. That the hounds in Leicestershire are better

than elsewhere, putting aside such famous packs as the Belvoir and the Warwickshire, I should not like to say, nor that they are faster; but still the fact that they are on grass makes the average of pace much faster, and a horse is kept much more on the stretch. Thus a Leicestershire hunter is required not only to gallop, but to gallop on. Let me take an instance. Suppose we have a fair scenting day and a good fox in a provincial country, and hounds run for half-an-hour. We have a start and are with the pack, but the little checks and pauses will come often and, although the huntsman may never need to cast his hounds from start to finish, we shall have many a chance to pull back into a canter, or even a trot, or to slip through a gate without losing our place and thus in a multitude of ways to save the horse while we have been with hounds all the time. But now, let us suppose that we have started with the pack from Barkby Holt, or Kibworth Sticks or Sheephorns. In each case the line will probably be over a perfectly rideable country. There is a scent; fox and hounds race away. Well, the chances are that for twenty minutes we shall scarcely have a chance even to take a pull, for we must ride straight or we shall lose hounds altogether. Hounds can beat horses, and thus the pack often has so long a start that all the hovers and momentary checks and casts are no advantage to the horse, save to enable us to stay with hounds. There is no chance to have a pull, for the horse is galloping and jumping all the time. This is what finds out the useful provincial hunter, "a very good horse at the pace he can go," and I am sure that an experience of my own will be confirmed by that of many others. With two horses that had done well in a by no means easy country, I came to Leicester-

shire after an absence of many years. The horses were hunters and the fences they could manage, but it was the pace that beat them. They fell not because the fences were too big, but because the pace was too fast for them.

A horse, then, must be able to stay, and to do this he must have condition. It is, however, a mistake to condemn a new purchase too hastily because he stops in a hard and fast run. I have heard or read somewhere of a purchaser giving £20 to a dealer to take back a horse that had stopped under him, when in fact the horse was only short of condition. We have in very many cases to make our horses fit after we buy them. Irish horses are seldom fit to go over Leicestershire when they first come over the Channel, and the same is true of horses bought in the provinces and from dealers. In buying horses, we want to look ahead and to remember that a horse takes time to be equal to the strain of a fast gallop over the ridge and furrow and undulating lands of the Shires.

Then a horse should be temperate and go up to his fences collectedly not only because one that rushes is dangerous, but also because he is sure to beat himself. In the crowds that cannot be avoided in Leicestershire a violent horse is dangerous, but here again it is wise not to condemn a new horse too hastily. I have known horses, which had been perfectly temperate and easy to ride in their own country, become so excited in a crowded field as to be almost useless. But if this is merely the nervousness of a high-strung horse in unfamiliar conditions, then patience and perseverance will usually work a cure. We all remember how Mr. Assheton Smith sent one horse home for this fault several times. Some horses are very violent unless they can see hounds, but once indulge

them with a sight of their friends and they sober down. Whether it is pleasure at the sight of a pack of hounds, or whether it is prudence arising from the suggestion to the horse's brain of hard work to come, I cannot say. "Too much foresight for a horse" it may be objected to the latter. Well, we know he has a wonderful memory; so why should he not be able to look forward a little? Horses do know when it is a hunting morning. At all events one horse I have in my mind did so. Violent enough at other times, he was perfectly quiet when he saw hounds. In any case, whatever the cause that makes a horse pull, it is necessary to be able to control him, and I know nothing better after all in ordinary cases than a long-cheeked curb with the lower rein passed through the rings of a running martingale, a gag where it is required, and one of Mr. Stokes's bits (made by Clarke and Son of Market Harborough) for more difficult cases. In all these instances we can regulate the pressure according to the necessity. But I am not going to discuss the problem of the pulling horse, except to say that if you can master him, well and good; if you cannot, Leicestershire is no place for a resolute, self-willed, pig-headed puller. *Multum in Parvo*, on one of his going days, would have killed some one to a certainty and very likely broken his own neck.

We have seen too that a horse must be, or at least should be, fairly sensible and intelligent, which a certain class of puller seldom is. A horse may catch hold because he is keen, or excitable, or sometimes because his teeth or mouth hurt him, or because he is unsuitably bitted; but a pig-headed puller is intolerable, and so is a stupid horse. I have known a horse that was really an idiot and could not take care of himself. He might rise at a fence, or he might not. On the

other hand, some horses will watch hounds and follow their movements, turning as they turn, and I well remember a very keen and clever little horse which jumped a stiffish fence with a friend of mine and, finding that hounds were running on the side he had left, insisted on jumping back again, not altogether to the satisfaction of the rider.

If you have an intelligent horse, as has already been said, it is worth while to try to cultivate and keep his mental faculties bright and clear.

A horse should, of course, be able to jump timber, and one that will not do this is no use in Leicestershire. Rails are not infrequent and sometimes they are the easiest, and often the only, way out of a field. True, timber is not quite so frequently leaped since people gave up jumping gates. Most people prefer hedges to gates nowadays, but it is said, I think in Mr. Cuthbert Bradley's "Reminiscences of Frank Gillard," that the late Duke of Rutland used often to jump five or six in a day's hunting. In Nimrod's time a horse was expected as a matter of course to jump a gate if required. Once, when the famous writer lived at Bilton Hall, he was pursued by bailiffs. The story goes that he met one of these gentlemen in a lane and putting the young horse he was riding at a high gate cleared it, and then turning in his saddle observed pleasantly to the bailiff, "Was not that well done for a young one?" But if gates are nowadays more often opened than leaped, rails and stiles are as stiff as ever and are not more often shirked, so that a Leicestershire horse must be able to jump them.

Having made up our minds what we want, and determined to buy our horses more for what they are and what they can do than for what they look like, where shall we get them from? By far the majority

of hunters come from Ireland, or are said to do so ; some from Yorkshire, others from Lincolnshire. Comparatively few are bred in the last-named county nowadays. There are, and always have been, some good horses bred in Shropshire, and I have been told that there are worse mounts than a Herefordshire-bred horse that has been schooled over that country. I have seen a few good ones out of Devon, and I hope that I shall not be accused of riding a hobby too hard if I say that in these wilder countries it is the admixture of pony blood that makes the horses what they are. I think this was pointed out by G. S. L. in some admirable papers on hunter breeding in the *Field*. I did not then, I am sorry to say, bind my *Fields* as I do now, so I cannot refer to them. But for any one with access to a file of that journal, the papers are well worth reading.

Of course the question arises, "How should a horse be bred for the Shires?" Probably the best horse of all would be a thoroughbred horse, and there have undoubtedly been some excellent hunters of that class. But they are very few, and when such horses are found they command very high prices. The ordinary light, rather weedy blood horse is not a favourite. He is rather apt not to rise at his fences, and he has not the weight to crash through a thorn fence, and his delicate skin makes him rather shy of thorns. He is sometimes fretful and uncertain in his temper. Nevertheless I can remember one good one. He was bought for a small sum as a three year-old out of a selling race, in which he ran fourth. Falling into judicious hands, he was made quiet and reasonable by careful hacking and steady light work about a farm. In the course of his daily rides he learned the rudiments of fencing and, when five years

old, he saw hounds in the cub-hunting season. His rider had the luck to drop into a nice little early gallop, starting alongside a musical pack and riding with them over a very practicable line of country for fifteen or twenty minutes. The little horse—he was only about 15.2—caught hold of his bridle and entered heartily into the fun of the thing; and there was henceforth no trouble in making a hunter of him. He was a most sensible little horse, never very fast, but quick and full of sense, and one of the readiest horses possible at getting himself out of a difficulty. Yet, on the whole, thoroughbred horses of the right stamp are not sufficiently often met with to be taken into consideration.

The commonest and best type of hunter for general purposes is the well-bred horse by a thoroughbred sire known to have jumping blood, out of a hunting mare. This is how most Irish horses are bred; so are most of the excellent horses which have come from the Holderness country. These are among the best that Yorkshire sends, and they generally reach us through the medium of a dealer. The famous prize-winner *Gendarme* was bred in Yorkshire. I have seen and judged some good horses in Cheshire too, but a proportion of these at all events come from Ireland. Leicestershire has had a few good ones, the prize-winner *St. Donats* being foaled within three miles of Market Harborough; and Mr. Fernie's *Barbarian* has sired some good stock, notably *Stella*, an excellent stamp of hunting mare, the property of Mr. Roe of Cranoe. Visitors to the Melton and Market Harborough Shows will be sure to see some excellent young stock.

I have also known some capital hunters sired by Arabs. These are notable for their endurance,

the corky way they come home after a hard day, and the rapidity with which they come round again after hard work. I have had two in my time, and both were excellent and up to a great deal more weight than they appeared to be. Half-bred Arabs are a little inclined to rush at their fences if they are allowed to do so ; but they are amenable to gentle handling and are very clever at putting their feet down. You never see them blundering into the débris of a broken gate or hurdle, and they are delightfully springy. They have, I think, a very unusual amount of sense in those long, lean, intelligent heads of theirs. There are, naturally, not very many of them, but there is a good deal more Arab blood about than is usually suspected ; and those who have known the Arab at home will not fail to recognise his characteristics when they appear. The Arab is a very prepotent race, and his descendants throw back in a remarkable way to their Eastern ancestors.

The next question that naturally arises is as to the choice of where the horses are to be bought. The visitor will do well to buy horses that know the country, and, making up his mind to pay a fair price, will find that certain well-known dealers will be able to supply him with what he wants. Mr. Hames of Leicester, Mr. Stokes of Market Harborough, Mr. Drage of Daventry, are all men of note in their business, and the two last named are most successful exhibitors of hunting stock. All thoroughly understand what a Leicestershire hunter ought to be, and their advice may be sought and followed with confidence. Then there are Mr. P. V. Beatty of Market Harborough and Mr. Cowley of Braybrooke. Both these gentlemen ride hard and well over a country, and are quite able to estimate both the wants and the capacities

of a man in search of a horse. Mr. Ansell, of Leamington, too, bears a name which is well known in India. Several of these gentlemen will supplement a weak stable with a hiring that is likely to be quite as good as anything that we have in our own boxes, and that is, at three guineas a day, a by no means expensive ride. But if the visitor is a man of judgment, or thinks that he is, there is an alternative method of mounting himself. There are the repositories of Tattersall, and of Messrs. Warner, Sheppard and Wade at Leicester. The gathering at the latter place on a Saturday, when the hunting season is at its height and one or two good studs are to be sold, is worth seeing, and there at different times, when some famous stud is to be dispersed, the leading masters of hounds and the riders of Melton, Harborough and Rugby, the Quorn, the Cottesmore, Mr. Fernie's and the Pytchley meet on common ground. To make the scene complete, the horses may be sold from the rostrum by the secretary of a famous hunt or by the master and huntsman of a well-known pack, whose voice cheers on the slack bidder, as in other scenes it rouses to keenness his own beautiful hounds.

Altogether the Leicester repository is a very pleasant place if you do not happen to be hunting on Saturday. Also it is an excellent place to buy a horse. You will often have the chance of buying horses with a character from a stable of established reputation. If you have any doubts as to soundness, you can have excellent advice from Mr. Simpkin, the hard-riding veterinary surgeon of Harborough, who always attends there. Such horses are seldom cheap, even if you buy them at the end of the season and keep them until the next. Every really first-rate horse is known, even the good roarers or whistlers being marked down.

The risk of failure is, of course, greater at the repository than if you buy of a first-rate dealer. You cannot have a trial, for one thing, nor can you have the long experience and judgment of the dealer, which in the case of those I have mentioned above is well worth buying. Nevertheless, if any one were to tell me that some pleasure is lost by not choosing your own horses, I should agree ; and I may point out that to be a judge of a horse is to a great extent a matter of practice and experience. Without seeking the one or undergoing the other, we can never acquire the gift. For a man who means to make hunting his amusement each successive winter, it will be well worth while to acquire the necessary knowledge of horse-flesh. For the experience and the knowledge he will have to pay, no doubt. The amateur, and the professional too for the matter of that, will continue to make mistakes to the end of the chapter, and he is the best judge and will lose least money over his horses who makes the smallest number.

At this point, I have no doubt the reader will ask what price he ought to pay for his horses. This is a difficult question to answer, since the reply depends on many circumstances. The best way for those who have the space and the means to keep them is to buy a suitable horse whenever they see him in the spring and summer, and to make acquaintance with their purchases before hunting begins. Those that do not suit should be rigidly weeded out, our object being sport not profit. It will then probably be found that by the beginning of the hunting season the six or seven horses which are retained will have averaged about 200 guineas apiece. If the horses are not bought till the autumn, you must add another fifty to the average at least. The price of hunters for Leicestershire

ranges from 150 guineas up to 450. Anything above that is a fancy price for an exceptionally gifted animal, or at least one that has a reputation of the highest class, or combines quality and weight-carrying power in an unusual degree. If the horses are bought from dealers or at repositories, as you find the opportunity, from 150 to 250 or 300 is about a fair price for a fourteen-stone horse practically sound and suitable for the country. Light-weight horses and those with certain failings can be bought for less money, and I have known from personal experience a stableful of brilliant and useful corks to average ninety-six guineas at the end of October. Such horses we may buy because our purse compels us, but no one would choose them deliberately. Yet they are probably the best for those who cannot afford to buy the well-bred, accomplished hunter which is most suitable for the Shires. Three or four such have I known which had each their good times. One was a raking thoroughbred that could fly his fences and beat most horses for twenty minutes, but needed a fifty-acre field to turn in. Another had a complicated buck; while a third, a thoroughbred mare, made a noise that literally "did not stop her," but then no bit would do so either; while the fourth was a nervous horse in a crowd, but a wonderful galloper and fencer that no human being could hold for ten minutes or so. When he had, so to speak, blown off the steam, he became a pleasant, safe, and much-enduring mount. But his owner has confessed to me that the anticipation of riding him until the critical ten minutes were over was not an additional cause of appetite at breakfast. No one who is not obliged should ride horses like this. The way of the screw-driver, like that of transgressors, is hard. Many of us have to follow it, but its diffi-

culties increase as time goes on. Yet I frankly confess after many years of horses of all kinds (except the best), that to ride such horses is very much better than not to hunt at all, and greatly intensifies the pleasure of occasional rides on the perfect animals that sometimes come one's way. But all the more do I dissuade the beginner from such practices, and regard as something less than wise the man who does not mount himself as well as he can afford to, and chooses his horses with less thought than he gives to his cigars or his wines. I do not think Leicestershire is the place for the man who wants to hunt cheaply, unless he is an unusually fine horseman and a very brave man.

Of course, in a book like this one can only deal with general principles, and therefore I should not be moved from this conviction by any number of exceptions that might be brought forward. They *are exceptions*, and most of us are not. Every one who makes up his mind to hunt comfortably in the Shires must put £1000 in his pocket to spend on his horses, and, allowing for casualties and depreciation, they should be worth three-fourths of that sum at any given moment when they were sent up for sale. They might of course be worth less or more, but that I think will be found a fair average calculation of the outlay on horseflesh and rather under than over the mark as an estimate.

CHAPTER XI

SPORT IN THE SHIRES

Impression of the Newcomer—The Horses—The Hounds—A Bitch Pack—Businesslike Procedure—A Find and a Kill—Another Typical Run—Home.

THE reader who has not been in the Shires before will necessarily wish to know what kind of sport to expect. He will find plenty of descriptions of brilliant runs and wonderful gallops in the newspapers. It is natural perhaps for the writers to magnify their office, but still I think it may be said that in the leading papers the stories of the hunts, as they are written season by season, are very excellent contemporary pictures of hunting. The runs are described in most cases by men who have a lifelong experience of the sport and have taken a more or less active part in the scenes which they endeavour to depict.

Perhaps the first impression that a meet in Leicestershire would make on the newcomer would be rather the businesslike character of the men and the horses than the splendour of the scene. Crowds as great may be seen elsewhere; quite as many people, for instance, in Cheshire and nearly as great a gathering to meet the Duke of Beaufort's hounds. Nor will the turn-out of the establishment and its followers be different from anything that you will see in any well-conducted hunt. Everything is for work and not for show.

It has already been noted that a Leicestershire horse may or may not be handsome, but he must be something more than useful, and he must be thoroughly fit to go, neither above himself for want of work nor stale from too much of it. Many of the horses are splendid specimens of weight carriers, for most men who can afford it like to have horses up to rather more than the rider's weight. The perfection of Leicestershire condition is to have a horse a little high in flesh with a thoroughly solid substratum of muscle. It may be taken as a general principle that a horse high in flesh will carry more weight than one which works fine. This is the point where the skill of the first-rate Melton trained groom comes in. It will be seen in the case of the hunt horses which, in spite of all their work, generally have a bloom on them. You could not indeed do better than look over such horses as Mr. Fernie finds for Charles Isaacs or Mr. Hanbury for Arthur Thatcher, and then keep the type in your mind for future reference.

The hounds, however, cannot fail to attract your attention. With a beautiful bloom on their coats, and in the perfect condition which is the first necessity for a pack in the Shires, they look like speed and staying. But it is not till you gaze closely at them that you note this latter quality, for the grace and elegance of their build gives them an appearance of lightness. Yet, with a careful examination, you will see the bone and muscle, and, should you at any time pay a visit to the kennel and have the opportunity of passing your hand over them, you will find out what substance a modern fox-hound has. The bitches look lighter than the dogs, but they have in proportion as much bone as their brothers. The extreme wisdom

and solemnity of the expression of the dog pack give them an appearance of size and solidity even out of proportion to their inches, while the keen and wistful look of the bitches, with their lighter heads, suggests rather the idea of grace and speed than strength.

One of the most perfect things in the whole of the sport of fox-hunting is to see a well-bred pack of bitches after their fox when the scent is sufficient to enable them to hunt, but not strong enough for them to race. There are days, but they are rare here as everywhere, when hounds simply tear along straining, as if the scent was so delicious they could not have enough of it. Then the foxchase becomes a steeplechase, in which the thoroughbred horses and the light weights come to the front. There are perhaps twenty men in the front rank riding almost in line and taking each fence as it comes. One falls; another refuses, or his horse does; a horse stops for want of condition, or is outpaced; and, perhaps of the twenty, twelve are actually there to see the hounds run into their fox at the end of five-and-twenty minutes. It is a hard and brutal fact that of the three hundred people who started, two hundred and eighty have never seen the hounds at all till they dribble up into the field where the huntsman is breaking up his fox. This is not the most enjoyable phase of hunting. That comes to the majority with a more ordinary scent. It is something like this. You trot down the street of a long straggling village with one of the ugliest of modern churches on your left. Just where the road turns over the bridge there spreads out before your eyes a panorama of wide grass fields. On your right is a sloping hill crowned by a most conspicuous clump of trees. In



A COTTESMORE GLIMPSE

front of you is a lovely valley, and blue and grey, in the distance to the left, lie a line of wooded hills. The hounds turn up to the right through a white gate, and the master leads his followers all into one field where they congregate as near as possible to a hand gate that leads into a small square covert of thick thorn bushes. This covert cannot be more than two or three acres in extent, and it looks like a tiny patch of dark green as you pass it by the road. No one would guess that it was one of the most famous coverts in Leicestershire.

There is very little talking ; most people have left off smoking ; and there is about the gathering an air of expectation. From hence the start may be a quick one. If you could see round the covert, you would find that there was a knot of foot people on every point of vantage. Half a mile away along the ridge towards which we are facing is a road, and that too is full of bicyclists and foot people. We will hope there are no horsemen trying to skirt for a start, which such people generally lose in two fields after they have fallen in with hounds. If you could see everything and everybody, you would imagine that no fox could go away without being headed. Indeed that is what happens now. No side of this covert is bad for sport, but one is less good than the others, for a couple of miles away is a hilly fastness with several coverts in its recesses between which foxes are wont to play hide-and-seek, and where hounds may spend half a day. It is one of those places where, if you are at the bottom, you wish you were at the top, and when you have climbed the steep sides, you wonder why you were ever such a fool as to leave the bottom.

On that side the fox breaks, but he runs up against

half the village in the road. As it is hereditary in Leicestershire men to holloa when they see a fox—they have done it for a hundred and fifty years and more and cannot help it—so it is hereditary in Leicestershire foxes not to mind. I should suppose that all the foxes that feared the howls of men and boys had long since been driven into the jaws of the pack and killed. It is such an obvious advantage in the struggle for existence to a race of foxes to have the courage to fly from the real danger—the hounds—and to disregard imaginary perils, that no doubt most foxes do actually make their point in spite of holloas. But on this occasion he meets a sheep-dog. Though the dog probably would not tackle a fox if he came to close quarters, yet the fox cannot be expected to know this and he turns back. Every one has rushed to obtain a sight of the hunt, and consequently when the fox peeps out on the other side of the thorns there is a clear course before him and a well-known covert, nay two, not very far away. Quick as the fox has been, a whipper-in is round quicker still, so, as the fox slips away, as he thinks, unseen, George's eye marks his flight up lengthwise of the ridge and furrow. But wisely the whipper-in says nothing, for away on the vantage ground under the clump of trees he sees a little knot of men and if he attracts their attention he knows that they will "holloa." Swiftly and silently two of the bitches cast themselves into the field; two or three more come out and join them and with a self-satisfied little whimper scour away. The huntsman has by a sort of instinct made his way round. His keen eye lights on the hounds and he gallops away with the leading couples, blowing his horn for the rest. The field in the meantime have a good start and are galloping a hundred yards to the right of the

pack. Some one has caught sight of the leading hounds, knows that they don't say much, squares his shoulders, catches his horse by the head, and races away up the field. Presently a loud chorus of shouts from the road marks the passage of the fox across it.

Up to this point the chase might or might not have grown into a first-rate run, but at the top of the hill the body of the pack are off the line and swing themselves away to the right in their endeavour to pick it up. Alas, two jealous silent little bitches have held on into the next valley. Some one tells the huntsman, and he holds the main body of the pack over the road which runs right along the top of the ridge, and, as they reach the descent beyond, the hounds acknowledge the line. But with two hounds ahead it can never be more than a hunt now. In the meantime the fields have reached the first fence, a stiff blackthorn mended here and there with rails; and some crash through it, some clear the rails, one man breaks the top bar and the less adventurous choke the place in a moment.

By the time we are over the ridge the hounds are down in the valley and the field has assumed the shape of a cone, at the apex of which is the huntsman and master, two well-known polo players, and other members of the hunt, each by this time settled into his usual place. At some farm buildings in the hollow comes a check, and there we pick up the two skirter that were by themselves. Now the reunited pack hunt prettily up the fields, opening out like a fan and closing again as they touch the line. There is neither dwelling nor pausing; everything is done at a gallop. The huntsman watches quietly, for he knows quite well that he cannot do more for them than they are doing for themselves. But they are silent, and

one beautiful bitch is working well, putting them right nearly every time, but, alas! she is like a famous hound a M. F. H. once pointed out to me in his pack. "Do you see that bitch? Well, she is too useful to draft; she is never wrong; but I have to tell a man off never to lose sight of her, for she is as mute as a mouse." She ought to have been drafted relentlessly all the same, as indeed all hounds should be that slip away silently, however good they are in other ways. They mar, in fact, more sport than they make.

But to return to our run. We are now working up with one well-known covert in front and another to the right, and at a hedgerow hounds check. The huntsman casts along the hedge and over the road and touches a feeble line. Then we give it up and go to draw elsewhere. The fox had run up to the hedgerow and, turned by a horse and cart in the turnpike, he had run a little way along it and then crossed it. Look round now. Every one is here because it is the sort of run that suits that proportion of men and horses in every field who are very good at the pace they can go. As the day begins, so it ends. We have several similar hunts and find ourselves at the close of the day not two miles from where we started. That is an ordinary everyday Leicestershire hunt, and very pleasant it is. The line was quite jumpable almost everywhere, and where a too upstanding fence has stretched across our path, why, there has been time to go round by the "open door." We jog home feeling that all is for the best in the best of all possible hunts. That is the prose of hunting. Now let me see its poetry, drawn like the former from nature.

We will suppose that we are present at one of the red-letter days of the season. A fine old dog-fox was taking his rest in a warm corner near the boundary

fence of a famous covert in the Quorn, one of those haunts of foxes which has been the starting-point for runs for three generations of sportsmen, for I have heard my grandfather talk of it when we children used to beg for a tale of his hunting experiences which he was as delighted to tell as we were to hear. There was an inkstand made out of the hoof of the horse that carried him so well, which was the text of the story. His father before him had hunted over the same classic ground and now we, in our day, are taking our best pleasure there too. But to return. If that fox had reasoned, as perhaps he did, he would have thought himself secure, for the covert had been drawn three weeks in succession and might therefore have been safe. Many of the field reasoned that a find was unlikely and lunched comfortably on the up-wind side of the covert, to their undoing. The false security of the fox perhaps and the absence of the greater part of the field certainly made for a quick start.

He was on his legs and away in a moment, for there was no time to linger. Hounds never paused or wavered, but settled to run at once. Now is the time when quickness may save a run. Catch hold of the horse and drive him along, for at the pace the hounds are going a stern chase would beat the best horse living. It will only be by luck and judgment that we can hope to see the finish; every pause, every turn must be used to help us. A fox that goes away in such bold fashion in the springtime has most likely a far-away point. And for full five miles he runs almost straight. The horse enters into the fun of it. With his ears forward, his neck and head carried at a beautiful angle, he makes no mistake till he hits on a bad take-off at the brook and barely saves a fall. Sit still, sit back, and leave his head

alone; and with a peck forward, a desperate recovery, and another blunder we are going again. There is a tuft of grass on the toe of the off boot, one curb rein over his ears, one stirrup hanging loose; and, as he breasts the hill, we take a pull. The horse loses ground by this, but he must be steadied, for such a mischance takes half a mile or more of staying power from him. Now we see the wires of the telegraph ahead and hope for a much-needed check.

We jump over this low stile into the road and trot steadily on the hard surface for the level crossing. Once over the rail, we hear the music of the pack ringing the changes, as first one hound and then another takes up the story and tells it to his fellows. They are turning towards us, and now we can see, as they pass close in front, one of the prettiest sights in the world, a pack running on a serving scent. What intensity of concentration; what resolution! They are no longer the domestic hound cribbed, cabined and confined in a kennel, but they are enjoying all the fierce delights of the wild red dogs, the *sone kutte* of the jungles. But we must be quick. Like a torrent they rush past. As a dream they will have vanished. Oh, the good fortune of that pull, for now up-hill we are toiling, and after five miles of such pace and over some stiff country even good horses falter. Then there is the down-hill gallop in our favour.

Who was it that cautioned riders against galloping hard down hill? Put the horse's head straight, pull him right back on his quarters, and he will hardly be doing more than if he was standing still. But now, again, there is one of the steepest declivities in Leicestershire before us. Hounds are hunting steadily, and over a beautiful line of country, where the grass is firm and the fences clean and fair, the pack works

its way. There is time to treat ourselves and the horse to a gate or two. Now faster, now slower the chase goes on. The first wild joy has gone out of it ; only there remains the stern resolution to see the end. We are some ten miles from the starting-point and have covered a distance half as long again ; but the fox is beaten, and when we see the roofs of one of the three chief towns of the smallest, but the best, hunting county in England, we know the end is near. The hounds are raging up and down the hedgerows as, in the last despairing effort for life, the fox turns ever shorter and more sharply. Whowhoop ! A gallant fox has paid his share of the ransom due for the existence of his race. We have seen the run of the season. A pail of warm gruel or chilled water and a few mouthfuls of hay for the horse ; a pull at the flask for ourselves ; and, with a cigar well alight we climb stiffly into the saddle, glad to find that the horse can step out for the nine mile trot back to Melton. Now ride on the crown of the road and dismount at the hills. Then after dinner the report from the stable will be, " Little or none the worse, sir. Eat up every oat ! "

CHAPTER XII

LADIES IN THE SHIRES

The Old time Hunting Woman—And the New—Ladies' Dress in the Field—The Right Sort of Hunter—Proper Side-saddles—Famous Lady Riders—The Late Empress of Austria—Hunting Manners—Expense of a Season in the Shires—Trying a Lady's Horse—Melton the best Centre for Women—Society at Melton and Leamington.

ONE of the most notable features of hunting in grass countries is the number of women in the field. Nor is the way in which they cross the country less remarkable. Of women who hunt a larger proportion ride at the top of the hunt than of men. Many indeed have a pilot, whom they follow, but others are quite capable of taking a line of their own and do so whenever hounds run hard. Times have very much changed with the Diana Vernons of to-day. Whereas in old times the woman who hunted was treated with courtesy, but was made to feel herself present on sufferance; now she has attained in the hunting field the much talked-of equality with man. No one would dream nowadays of treating the question of whether women should hunt at all as an open one. The only discussion that ever arises is whether women should hunt four days or six in a week. Yet it is evident that Whyte-Melville had his doubts on the point, as those may note who read "Kate Coventry." That heroine was expected to give up hunting on her marriage as a

matter of course. For some time indeed women have retained certain privileges. They were exempt from subscriptions, were given the first chance at gates and gaps, and were permitted unrebuked to do things that were forbidden to men. But now all this has changed. Women are expected to subscribe. The cap is collected from them as from any one else in hunts where they are strangers or visitors. They take their turn at gates or gaps; and the only possible privilege that remains to them is to ride perhaps a shade closer to their leader and to give him a little less room at a fence than a man would be expected to do under similar circumstances. No one who goes to Melton for the first time can possibly fail to note the admirable riding and turn-out of the ladies whom he will see there. Everything is plain, practical and neat. The cut and fit of the habits is for the most part perfect. A serviceable grey cloth is the most common with an apron, a useful long-skirted coat and a neatly tied hunting scarf with a plain gold safety-pin. No jewellery, of course; no fluttering ends. The whole is crowned with a tall hat or a well-fitting round one. A stout serviceable hunting whip (of course with a thong), stout enough to catch and hold a gate, is always carried. Many women wear a spur, but that should only be permitted to those who are really horsewomen of the first class. We shall see that the horses they ride are strong and useful animals, often up to fourteen stone and well-bred hunters, but not thoroughbred as a rule. The clean-bred horse is generally too uncertain a conveyance over a stiff country to be safe or suitable for a lady. I should say that the majority of ladies' hunters came from Ireland. I know of several ladies who keep large studs whose horses are carefully

selected for them in that country. Irish hunters, as we all know, are well bred but seldom or never thoroughbred. For the matter of that, as I have noted elsewhere, whatever may be our theory, in practice there are very few thoroughbred horses in the Shires. In selecting ladies' horses the inevitable disadvantage at which a woman's seat on horseback places her must be borne in mind. Even with all our modern improvements in saddles, the handicap is against the woman in the hunting field, and therefore her horse should have manners in a crowd, and should be a really well-schooled hunter. I would rather have manners and cleverness than pace. In the long run, this applies to the needs of many men as well. A very well-mannered horse that is clever withal will show you more sport in grass countries than an apparently faster, but less tractable, animal. It is, however, a fact that in the course of a season women hunting in the Shires, in proportion to their relative numbers, have fewer and less serious falls than do men. The reason of this is threefold. First, that women, from the nature of their seat, are obliged to give a horse more rope at his fences and are less able to interfere with him. Then, they generally ride horses more than up to the weight to be carried. Lastly, women who do not ride up to a fairly high standard retire early from the fray with shattered nerves as the result of a serious fall. A man can ride moderately badly for many years over a country without serious results, but the chances are against an inferior horse-woman. Naturally, when she falls, it is more likely to be a dangerous affair than is a tumble to a man. But, whatever their disadvantages, there can be no doubt that women take a very leading part in the game nowadays, and that when hounds run hard over a

stiff country, a large porportion of habits will be in the front rank. It is usual to say that women cannot take their own line over a country. Of the majority this is doubtless true, but, so far as I can see, it is equally true of the majority of men. But there are some ladies who ride with the fashionable packs, whose names are well known to all who hunt in the Shires, who can and do take their own line with all the judgment and more than the coolness and tact of any man. It was an experienced man who once said that one reason why women ride so well to hounds is because they pay more attention than men to what is going on. Women have a greater capacity for taking pains than men have, especially in the small matters on which so much success in all matters of sport depends. But let us turn back for a moment to the past and trace the coming of ladies to share the sport of hunting and see what their influence has been and is on its fortunes. In the first half of the last century the ladies who hunted were few. As I have elsewhere pointed out, it was difficult, if not impossible, for them to follow hounds with any degree of comfort and safety on the old-fashioned saddle. The wonder is not that there were so many, but that there were any at all. Yet here and there in the old writers we find allusions to ladies who hunted and took a forward place. There were, for example, Lady Cleveland and Lady Augusta Milbanke, who must have made a brave show in their scarlet habits. They hunted three times a fortnight and had been used to hunting from the time when they were children, but the general opinion of the day is reflected in Nimrod's remark, "*Yet it would be difficult to produce two more amiable or accomplished persons.*" Then in 1841 came Miss Nellie Holmes, "Topping the fences like a

bird, to the admiration of all.” Then the Misses Loraine Smith, “who rode in scarlet bodices and grey skirts,” and Lady Eleanor Lowther, who used to be piloted with the Quorn and Cottesmore by Dick Christian.* I know no more thrilling touch in all the famous hunting lectures than Dick’s account of their ride up Burrough Hill, one of the steepest of the many acclivities of Leicestershire. “Near the top if I didn’t think she and the horse would come backwards. I says, ‘Do, my lady, catch hold of the horse’s mane and lean forwards more,’ so we gets up safe, and my word the gentlemen did stare when they see us.” I suggest that the moral of that story is that a mane on a horse is very convenient sometimes, and indeed big horses should never be hogged. Then there was Miss Manners of Goadby, who was sure “papa would be very angry if she went home without seeing the end of the run”; and the brilliant Frenchwoman, Mrs. Shakerley, who went well over Warwickshire and Leicestershire on her famous chestnut horse Golden Ball. But it was not till the ’seventies that ladies began to take a regular part in hunting. There was Mrs. Arthur of Desborough hunting with the Pytchley. She had an eye like a hawk, a nerve like a lion, and was always ready to lend the huntsman a hand. Mrs. Arthur was one of those ladies, of whom we see many nowadays, who understand hunting as well as riding, and doubled her fun by taking an interest in the working of the hounds. A little later came those two brilliant sisters, the ex-queen of Naples and the late Empress of Austria. They were, as was perhaps natural, most fond of the riding aspect of hunting, but the story of their riding over a country has been told so well by Mr. Elliott, the good sportsman who

* “Fifty Years Fox-hunting,” by T. E. Elliott.

wrote a delightful book, "Fifty Years Fox-hunting," that I will not repeat it here. Mr. Elliott was the chosen pilot of both the ex-Queen and the late Empress. One advantage the ladies who rode to hounds thirty years ago certainly had: no one went out except for pleasure. A woman who hunted had to overcome some difficulties and withstand a certain amount of disapproval. Now, hunting is fashionable, and is regarded sometimes perhaps as one method of rising in the social scale. Nevertheless, though there may be something of this in the present day, there is certainly not much. At this point I may turn aside for a moment to give a word of caution to those whose knowledge of hunting, and especially hunting in the Shires, is derived from books and newspapers. Many of the writers have no more than a theoretical acquaintance with hunting, and are full of fancies very wide of the truth. It may be taken as a general rule that the majority of hunting people are not different in any way from the ordinary well-dressed, well-mannered Englishman or Englishwoman of their class. There is nothing particularly remarkable about hunting society, and hunting women are much like other English ladies. The sport is only one side of their lives, and they have their other interests, domestic, social, literary, just like everybody else. One distinguished author has said that they are coarse, but that is a libel born of ignorance and *a priori* reasoning. If your knowledge of hunting dates not later than Squire Western, or even than the writings of Nimrod, you necessarily have quite an erroneous idea of what hunting is at the present and what hunting society is like. There is no doubt at all that the presence of ladies in the hunting field has greatly softened the manners of the followers of chase; and it is a fact

which no one who has a personal acquaintance with hunting in grass countries, or indeed anywhere else, would deny that a lady or a clergyman can share in the sport to-day without the faintest possibility of offence to the most delicate susceptibilities. I apologise to those who know for stating truisms, but there are very different, and certainly undeserved, pictures drawn of life and society in fashionable hunts. Of course, there are faults and blots. Freedom here and there degenerates into licence; liberal expenditure into extravagance. But that is only to say that hunting society is human. If, as has been said, there is sometimes "a mixture of outrageous lavishness and meanness," that is only a characteristic common to the ignoble side of modern society. The cure of these evils is to a great extent in the hands of the best of the ladies who hunt. They can make selfishness and meanness unfashionable, and politeness and courtesy the proper thing. It ought not to be possible to speak in their hearing of the residents as "cursed locals." Readily I acknowledge that there are many ladies who do try their best, and successfully, to bring about a tone of feeling more worthy of gentlefolk. No names of living people have been or will be mentioned in this chapter, but it is as I have said, and there are many houses in Leicestershire and Northamptonshire tenanted in the hunting season by those whose presence adds to the happiness and well-being of the neighbourhood. Of one thing we may be quite certain, that in these days fashionable hunts could not long exist if they were centres of corruption. The lady of a house has, moreover, much power, and, if she will take trouble, can render many services to sport. It is not so much any active mis-doing as idleness and self-indulgence which cause

people to forget to direct their expenditure into the proper channels and make them overlook the duties (for such they are) of courtesy and kindness.

Enough, however, of such reflections ! Let us turn back to the practical side of hunting in the Shires. Suppose that the family authorities have decided on a season in Leicestershire—then there is much to be thought of—a new habit or two, a covert coat, and all the details of a hunting outfit, every portion of which should be of the best. It is not necessary to have many things if your purse is limited, but it is necessary to have them of the best in both cut and material. It is needful that everything should fit and that there should be no possibility of discomfort. Above all, the saddle should be perfectly suitable to the rider. Important for a man, this is absolutely indispensable for a woman ; and then, too, you must have the horse you can ride. If shoulders in a hunter are, as Lord Willoughby de Broke said, a luxury for the rich man, they are a necessity for any woman. But do not take the opinion of any one or trust the judgment of your own eye as to a horse's shoulders when standing on the ground alongside him. Order your saddle to be put on, and see that it is placed in the right place behind, and not on the top of, the withers. Then get up and trot down hill over ridge and furrow if you can find a field near at hand. If there seems to be plenty in front of you, if the horse takes out a long rein and gives you a feeling of confidence, moving easily and smoothly, he can use his shoulders and he will do. But if you feel as if you were sitting on the edge of a precipice, have nothing to do with him. You cannot ride over Leicestershire in safety in a side-saddle on a bad-shouldered horse. A moderate-sized horse is to be preferred to a tall, flat-

sided, leggy horse. There have been some wonderful ponies too. I can recall no less than six ponies that have carried ladies brilliantly over the Shires within a space of but a few years.

Of all the hunting centres mentioned most women would, I think, like Melton, both socially and as a place to hunt from, better than any other, unless indeed, they prefer altogether a life away from towns in some of the "Halls," "Lodges," and "Granges" which are scattered all over the country. But if in Leicestershire you choose to live in the country, which you may do, from choice or from motives of economy, you must make up your mind to a quiet winter. I have already written about expenses, and of course it is true that people should not try to hunt in Leicestershire cheaply. But there will be some also who can manage necessary expenditure on the stable by care and economy in the house. That this is the case in the Shires any ordinary observer can perceive if he notes the number of small dwellings with extensive, and even splendid, ranges of stabling. These are to be seen in the village streets, and on the outskirts they are converted cottages and farm-houses. But there is, of course, a limit to the stable accommodation, good as it is, and also to the stable staff. Now, in Leicestershire it is impossible in most cases to drive in from one village to another without opening (and, I hope, shutting also) several gates. This makes it quite impracticable to go out without a man. If there are ladies only in a brougham, and the night is wet, they want a footman as well. But work in a hunting stable is hard, and many of us stay at home because it is really difficult and expensive to traverse the two or three miles of gated road which divide us from our nearest neighbours.

Even if you are not yourself hampered by these considerations, your neighbours will be unwilling to go out at night, and therefore we are, if in the country, restricted to our family circle for the evenings. A great many people do not care to go out after hunting. Therefore if you are a sociable soul, then Melton or Leamington will suit you better according to your means and social position, than any of the other centres or than all the villages of which I have written.

CHAPTER XIII

DRESS AND EQUIPMENT

Nimrod—The Essentials—Dress for the Horse—Second Horseman—Smoking in the Field—Lunch—Drinks—Importance of Keeping Fit—Well-made Clothes Necessary—Saddles—Straining the Muscles—The Ethics of Spurs—Whyte-Melville's "Riding Recollections"—Often Necessary—Value of School Training—Arguments in Favour of Spurs.

THIS will not be a long chapter, because there is really very little to be said. If the reader has no views on the subject, then I think he cannot do better than put himself into the hands of a first-rate tailor and bootmaker and leave the matter to them. The only peculiarity about dress for hunting in Leicestershire is that if you are particularly well-dressed no one will notice it, and if you prefer mufti, no one will mind. I do not think masters as a rule in the Shires are much disturbed if their followers do not come out in pink. They have many other things to think of, and, provided you do not ride over the hounds and do no more damage than you can help, they do not care how you clothe yourself.

It was not always so, but then hunting society, like every other, was much smaller, and the first historian of hunting, Nimrod, was a dressy man and a bit of a dandy. Besides, there is no great difference nowadays between the dress of a Melton man and that of a well turned out man in the provinces,



A PYTCHLEY PANORAMA

and Mr. Sawyer certainly would not appear at the covert-side anywhere in a cap, nor could a stranger be detected by his boots. As long as you wear a tall hat or a respectable bowler, have a thong to your whip, and don't put your spurs on upside down, do not wear a coloured tie, or in any other way outrage the reasonable prejudices of society, no one will care how you are dressed. The crowds are so large that no individual is of much consequence. You will find, or make, your own friends according to what you are and have. The way you ride and the quality of your horses are of infinitely more importance than anything to do with yourself or your attire.

The outfit of the horse is quite another matter. That should be of the best. Need I say that plain-flapped saddles are at once the most comfortable and the most usual, that nobody nowadays puts a breast-plate on, and that reins are always sewn, not buckled, to the bit. If you have a second horseman, he carries your luncheon on his back; if not, you carry it in a neat canteen on the D's of your saddle. This is preferable to the hunting horn flask, which is nevertheless not uncommon. I have never seen any one smoking a pipe in the hunting field, but cigarettes and cigars are usual. It adds greatly to your comfort to carry vesuvians in your match-case, unless you are very clever at lighting a cigar or a cigarette from an ordinary match in the open air, which apparently very few men can do.

People differ theoretically about lunch, but in practice most men enjoy it. I do not believe a big meal is good for riding, any more than for shooting. Two sandwiches in the middle of the day and a small slice of cake to eat on the way home are quite enough for health. As to the contents of the flask, that is

not a matter to dogmatise about. Mr. Meynell, we know, carried tincture of rhubarb, and I have known a flask to hold extract of meat or beef tea of some kind. Most people, I think, carry whisky and water; a few whisky and soda. I have heard of, but never seen, cherry brandy or sloe gin, and for my own part I think a light, sound port is the best and most sustaining liquid: a few sips in the middle of the day, and the rest to encourage you to smoke on your way home. I believe that almost every one is better for something to eat and drink in the middle of the day, and I think that both the Goodalls shortened their lives by their habit of not taking lunch.

It is most important for a man who wishes to enjoy sport in the grass countries to the full to keep fit. Without going into any rigours of training, the strictest moderation and early hours are desirable. Many horses are beaten because their riders are so done that they cannot sit still in the saddle, and many falls are occasioned by the unsteadiness of a rider who is more than half blown when he has been galloping for a quarter of an hour. There is not the smallest doubt either that loss of condition is followed rapidly by loss of nerve. A man who, after his first youth is past, would keep his place in the front rank must live to a certain extent by rule.

There are, no doubt, as we shall be told, exceptions to this, and indeed, so far as we are able to judge of other men's lives, we see those who seem to ride as well as ever, yet who, as the phrase goes, "do themselves well." This means not great excess, but a little too much of everything. A little too much wine, just a cigar more than is wise, or a little too much food. If we are to trust the records of the past, our forefathers drank a great deal of wine and yet rode

very hard, but I think I have read somewhere that strict temperance was the rule of the Old Club at Melton, and that one bottle of wine after dinner was the limit. But we must recollect that our forefathers did not smoke long cigars or short cigarettes as we do. Looking back over the men I have known who were hard riders and that have kept their nerve, it appears to me that they all exercised much care and self-denial. There are two forms of indulgence that would destroy the strongest nerves in time. Tobacco in the form of cigars or cigarettes in large quantities—a pipe does not seem to have the same effect, and late hours.

It is of importance to have your clothes well made, because they cannot otherwise be comfortable, and comfort is a matter of great moment in hunting. We ought to be at our ease, and not to be reminded of our dress by untimely wrinkles or pinches. We require also to have the free use of our arms and legs, and, above all, we need comfortable boots, and this is barely compatible with a smart boot on the leg of a man who has ruined its proportions from a boot-maker's point of view by riding a bicycle, walking over the moors, or running with otter-hounds. It is only the very greatest artists in boots who fit us nicely, and even for them it is no easy task. But, at whatever cost, the boot must be comfortable. To ride really well to a flying pack on the grass needs that we should have absolute control of our limbs and all our faculties undistracted. Thus every detail of the hunting kit deserves the greatest attention from this point of view. The shirt, the tie, the gloves and even such minor articles as the collar studs, which no manufacturer will ever make reasonably long in the shank, all should be of such ex-

cellence as to be effective, yet never for a moment obtrusive.

In the same way the saddles should be made to fit the rider, the stirrup leathers should be flexible, and the saddle must also suit the horse. Perhaps the best plan is to have a saddle made which is of the right length—I find many saddles too short for comfort—and with the cut that suits your seat, since each man necessarily differs in this respect from every other, and then to have one stuffed, and of course restuffed as time goes on, to fit each horse in the stable. In this way each hunter will go at ease in a saddle that fits him, and that enables his rider to sit in the right place. There is no doubt that a saddle makes all the difference between comfort and safety and the reverse, and it is a matter on which it is impossible to spend too much care and attention at first. There is of course no doubt, especially if we have not been riding much during the summer, that the seat will alter a little in the course of the season, but altering and shortening the stirrups will give all the change we require. A saddle should always be roomy, for there is absolutely nothing to be gained by trying to save weight in the saddle, and, on the contrary, a saddle too small for the rider tires a horse. A badly fitting saddle is a fruitful source of riders' strain, so are stiff stirrup leathers, and so too is a big jumping horse. If you buy a horse from a man, say, a couple of stones heavier than yourself, you should look out for this. The horse will spring as he has been accustomed to do under the heavy weight, and the effort will of course not meet with the usual resistance. It is this spring, the twist of powerful hind-quarters expecting, as it were, to have to hoist a heavy man over a fence, that strains us.

This kind of strain will be rather painful in the evening of the day in which we suffered it, but it will be agony next day. I remember hunting after a bad strain and being just on the point of going home. "Where are you off to?" said a friend. "Oh, I've strained the rider's muscle and I can't ride, so I'm off." "But you'll never come right if you lie up. The right thing to do is to ride and jump; and the more it hurts, the better." And so it proved. If pain was a sign of the cure working, there was no doubt about the efficacy of the prescription, but the strain got well in due time and I lost no hunting.

It is astonishing how common this strain of the rider's muscle is. A great many people suffer from it. The causes are, I imagine, first and foremost, want of condition. When I lived on the northern frontier of India, where everybody rode and played polo or racquets in the cold weather, and in the summer all who could get leave went to Kashmir for shooting, I never heard of such a thing as rider's strain, nor in many years in the saddle on horses of all sorts and shapes have I ever suffered from it before. But I am sure that my friend was in the right. The only thing to do is to go on riding as best one can till the muscles regain their tone. Nevertheless it is a most unpleasant experience, and the strain can be prevented, I am sure, to some extent by care in the matter of saddles and by "setting more at liberty" on a big jumping horse.

There is another article of our equipment for the hunting field, the value of which is much discussed nowadays. I refer to the spur. So far as I know, until comparatively recently, the spur was regarded as a necessary part of the horseman's outfit. But there have been a good many writers who have

advocated its disuse, of whom the chief was Whyte-Melville. He devotes a whole chapter in his "Riding Recollections" to the "abuse of the spur." We may infer from this title that Major Whyte-Melville would not have objected to the proper use of spurs, but we also gather from the chapter in question that he was rather doubtful as to when the use of spurs was legitimate. I think that the question is one which lends itself admirably to argument, but is really decided in practice in favour of spurs. Very few men would ride over Leicestershire without them.

Nor is this merely because spurs are no doubt an admirable decoration to a well hung boot, but because they have a real use on the road and in the field, and should not be disused because they are only for occasional use. A stimulus, like a stimulant, is all the more effective if used but seldom. A sudden touch with the spurs will often decide a horse to jump when he has doubts about refusing. Taken by surprise, he will often spring, and if at the same time we catch hold of his head, a touch of the spurs has the effect of making him bring his hind legs well under him as he takes off. Many horses will neither gallop nor jump at all freely if the rider has no spurs on. One horse I knew was admirable with spurs if he knew they were on his rider's heels, but without them he was impossible. It was not necessary often to use them, if on first mounting, or on the first sign of recalcitrance he was touched behind the girth with the rowels. That was enough, and he would go freely and well all day. Leave the spurs at home, and you could hardly induce him to go decently on the road. There are very many horses like this, and every one can recall similar

instances of horses that without spurs were refusers, but with them were useful hunters.

The use of spurs is another argument for the value of judicious school training for both the horse and his rider. The first learns to understand the indications of the spur, and the latter to apply it in the right manner, at the right time, and on the proper spot. It may be freely admitted that some men would be safer without spurs, but the same argument would apply to the bridle wrongly used. That too is a source of pain to the horse and danger to the rider. Such riders as have not learned, or will not be taught, to use a spur properly must do the best they can without, and if the horse requires correction they must use a whip. But there is the greatest objection to the latter in the hunting field. If you strike a horse he never forgets it, and every time your right arm goes up he will look to see whether it means a blow instead of looking where he is going. The hunter needs to keep an undivided attention on what he is doing. Therefore it is well worth while to learn to use spurs properly. The touch of the steel comes as a sudden, unexpected stimulus, and in most cases causes a horse to make a sudden spring forward. It is thus often useful when a horse is playing the fool in an awkward place, bucking or rearing. The prick of the rowels will cause him to spring forward and catch hold of his bit, when he is far more easy to manage.

In nine cases out of ten a horse that means mischief begins by refusing to go up to his bit. Very often it is not necessary to do more than squeeze him with the legs, and possibly draw the feet back a little. If he has been properly schooled he knows what that means, and at once from the force of habit catches

hold of his bit and goes forward, when he is under control again. I would never ride a strange horse without spurs unless told expressly that they were unnecessary. But of course the question will be asked: What of the man who spurs a horse without knowing it? Well, he must, I suppose, take his chance without spurs, or at all events be content with spurs without rowels. Or, again, it may be asked: How about the involuntary spurring of the horse even by good riders whose legs may be dragged back by binders as they crash through some ragged fence and the spur is thus forced against the horse?

Well, to this I reply that the chance seems remote, because if you look at the horses of most of the best men across country in the Shires, you will seldom or never see them touched at all, even after a hard run. In any case it is for the horse one of the chances of war.

But it is not only in the chase that the spurs will be found useful. During the long and weary jog home, if the curb rein be lightly drawn through the fingers and the spur delicately used, a horse will trot more collectedly and safely. Some very excellent hunters, moreover, are such shocking bad hacks that we need all the aids we can call to our assistance to keep them on their legs when they are trotting along the road. Again, it may be said that dummy spurs are quite as useful as sharp ones. Putting aside the fact that the punishment they inflict is often nearly, if not quite, as severe as the armed ones, I should not say they were unless the horse has been thoroughly trained to the use of sharp spurs. With most horses who have been so schooled, the spur without rowels is most useful. A touch of the cold steel will be all that is required. As a rule, for my own part, I always

hack in sharp spurs and hunt in blunt ones. Nevertheless there are horses that need sharp spurs at all times. It may be a question whether the modern long, straight spur is not more useful as a decoration than valuable for its own particular purpose. The short spur with the slight downward curve, which was for many years the usual shape, appears to have all the advantages and fewer of the disadvantages of spurs than the long, straight, rather murderous-looking weapons that are now the fashion.

It will, I think, be found that nearly, if not quite, all the men and women who really ride hard over the grass countries ride in spurs. Indeed, I should say they were absolutely necessary in Leicestershire and desirable anywhere. But the proper use of the spur does not come by nature, and though, like many other habits of horsemanship, we have forgotten when we did not know it, yet to riders lacking in experience it will be sound advice that if they do not know how to use spurs they should learn as soon as possible.

CHAPTER XIV

EXPENSES

Difficulty of laying down Actual Expenses—Melton the Most Expensive Centre—Wages of Grooms—And of Helpers—Forage—Purchase from the Farmer where Practicable—Danger of Friction—Avoid Foreign Produce—Local Tradesmen often to Blame—Subscriptions.

THIS is a difficult chapter to write, and those who turn to it under the impression that they will find an exact estimate of the cost of a season's hunting in the Midlands will be disappointed. All calculations of this kind must be misleading, for everything depends on the tastes of the individual man or woman. A season or two at Melton, or Market Harborough, will certainly cost more than it will to hunt from home, but not, I think, more than it would to spend a season in a fashionable provincial country like the Duke of Beaufort's or the Bicester. Then again the cost would vary with the locality chosen. No one would choose Melton if economy were an object. I have no doubt that there, as elsewhere, things may be done cheaply, but one would not choose such a place if it were desired to keep the expenses as low as possible.

Everywhere one hunts from, whether Shires or provinces, horses' meat and grooms' wages have to be paid. My object, then, will be to indicate in what

points in my opinion it will be necessary to make a greater outlay in the fashionable countries than elsewhere. Speaking roughly, however, it will be found that, of the centres I have named, Melton would be the most expensive, for the very simple reason that more people desire to go there, and they are those who either have money or spend it. I do not think that two important items, wages and forage, are higher there than elsewhere. A working stud groom would have from 24s. to 30s. a week, and in special cases I have known 40s. to be paid, but of course I have nothing to do now with special wages such as these. If a stud groom in charge of a large stud of horses is honest and capable, it is difficult to assess his value. A Melton stud groom, whose master hunts six days a week during the season and seldom sees his horses from March to November, or only goes into his stable on Sunday afternoons, has a great responsibility. Not only has he the charge of much valuable property in horseflesh and the practical control of a large expenditure, but on the conscientious way in which he discharges his duty depends to a great degree the safety of his master. I readily acknowledge that many of these men are remarkable both for integrity and ability, and they are then worth any reasonable salary that can be paid them. The first-rate men are as rare in the stable as elsewhere.

Of such men, however, I am not writing, but of the ordinary working hunting groom who does his duty under his master's eye, and in his turn sees that his helpers do theirs. His wages would be as above, with an extra lodging allowance of 4s. a week when he is away from home if no cottage is supplied. This sum is what I have paid, and it was the usual allow-

ance at the Ranelagh Club, but I am told that 5s. allowance for lodging is paid by some officers when in garrison towns. Helpers, as a rule, in Leicestershire receive 18s. a week, and one to about every three horses is a fair average staff for the stable. Thus with seven horses and a pony and cart I should say that a working stud groom and two helpers was sufficient. I am bound, however, to say that in some stables a man to every two horses is the rule, though I fail to see that anything is gained by this. In small establishments the head groom or one of the helpers often acts as second horseman, but it is of course more usual to have a second horseman who makes that his principal duty, and his wages I should put down at 22s. per week, though I have known a man complain that he could not live on this sum. The stud groom and the second horseman are generally permanent servants, the helpers being local men who are taken on as required. There always seems to be a supply of them, and I have often wondered what they do in the summer.

Forage is an item which is variable, but I think that prices are somewhat higher in the Midlands than elsewhere. This is not a district that produces a great deal of hay or corn, and most of its supplies therefore are drawn from elsewhere. If, however, the prices are high, the quality is excellent; and I never had better forage than from the leading dealers at Melton and Harborough. When I first went to dwell in a certain hunt in Leicestershire, I inquired of the secretary where he would like the forage bought, and he advised me to go to the corn-dealer of the place. We hear a great deal, it is true, about buying hay and corn from farmers, but my experience is that the comparatively small quantities that are

required and the irregular times at which they are wanted in private stables do not suit the farmer. Then there is the question of credit. No doubt ready money is best for both buyer and seller ; but it is not always possible to conduct our business on this excellent system, as every one knows, and it does not always suit the farmer to give credit, nor is it fair to ask him to do so.

I doubt, therefore, whether the direct purchase of forage from the farmer is practicable as a general rule, or even desirable in the interests of hunting and of farmers. Every case must be decided on its merits, and at all events certain ideas must be rooted out from the minds of both the buyer and seller. The man who buys hay and corn from farmers ought to pay the market price or a little over, and to pay ready money. To suppose that he is to pay less than in the case of purchases from a dealer, and to take credit as well, is to mistake the conditions of the forage market and to do more harm than good by his purchases. If a hunting man finds that it is desirable to buy from farmers, he does so because he thinks it is in the interests of hunting and not for the sake of his pocket or convenience. It will, as a matter of fact, neither save the one nor suit the other, though there are a good many people in the world who want to do good actions and "make a bit" at the same time. If a hunting man is willing and able to buy hay or corn, particularly the former, from his neighbours *when they want to sell*, and will put his hand in his pocket and pay a good price there and then, no doubt he will make hunting more popular. But if he is to haggle and try to obtain discount, if he keeps the farmer waiting and ignores requests for money, and above all if his groom is not moderate in his demands

for commission, I venture to say he will do far more harm than good.

The fact is, however, that the real benefit to agriculture from hunting is derived from the general demand for high-class forage and the consequent steady market and fair average of price that is maintained. It is not in the power of all hunting people to deal with farmers. Theoretically, and judging by what some writers say, you would suppose that people who hunt always had command of money as a matter of course. But not only do incomes vary greatly, but their sources are sometimes more or less uncertain, and credit always has been and always will be a necessary factor in the dealings between buyer and seller, customer and tradesman, whether in hunting countries or elsewhere.

There is yet another obstacle to buying forage of farmers in a hunting country, and that is the danger of a quarrel. I have found that, whereas in London and other large towns any objection to the quality of goods supplied is taken as a matter of business, to complain in the country is regarded as a personal offence. The seller in the village and the smaller tradesman have a certain feeling of resentment if you do not like what they have to sell. The farmer often takes offence if you complain of the quality of the forage he sells you. The offence too, is often deep in proportion as he is sensible of the justice of your complaint. I have known a quarrel over a load of hay to cause the wire on a farm to remain up all through the season. If, however, farmers would combine and open a central forage store in hunting towns, they *might* pocket the profits of the middleman. But, the conditions of things being what they are, the failings of human nature being taken into

consideration, and the friction caused by dealings with money of whatever sort remembered, my advice to the ordinary man, in the interests of both himself and hunting would be, that he should buy his forage from the local corn-dealer, who, after all, must have procured it from a farmer somewhere.

This one rule, however, every hunting man ought to make, that under no circumstances and on no pretext will he buy foreign produce for the hunting stable. That gives offence, and just offence, to farmers, who have a right to expect support and favour in every possible way for the agricultural interest from the people who ride over their land. Russian oats and Canadian hay should be rigidly barred. There is a very infinitesimal present saving to be made by using these articles, and horses fed on them are never within many pounds as fit as those foraged on old oats and old English hay well saved. No foreign stuff should ever come into the stables on any plea whatever. Its exclusion is a simple duty we owe to the farmers.

Another vexed question is that of dealing with local tradesmen, and with the friendliest feelings towards this class I feel that we are not the only people to blame if a great deal of custom goes away from the town in or near which we live and is absorbed by big shops and stores in large towns. It is well known that many of these huge retail stores lay themselves out for country custom and that they have profited largely by doing this. In dealing with them it is not, however, nearly so much a question of price as the fact that country tradesmen will not or cannot give people what they want. I have known a whole family's custom taken away from a country grocer, because nothing would induce him to supply certain

matches for the household. Reasonably or unreasonably, the customer fancied these particular matches, but if a few packets came, as it were under protest, from the grocer, the unspeakable foreign matches were sure to reappear. As it manifestly is not worth while to send to London for matches only, the result may be imagined. I think that this unwillingness to supply what is wanted is a survival from the old days when the country tradesman expected his customers to help him to clear off his stock, and they took as a matter of course what he had to sell. In a certain small town dialogues like the following were not unknown. "I do not like this cheese, Mr. Mr. —." "Well, m'm, I'm sorry, but I can't cut another till that is finished," and he didn't, though his customer was housekeeper to a large family. But then there were no stores, no great shops, no parcel post, and London was much farther off then from the Midlands than it is now.

Yet I think that visitors to a hunting district are morally bound to deal where they hunt. How can we expect people to appreciate the benefits of the expenditure on hunting if none of it comes their way? Indirect benefits may be very considerable, but they do not affect the imagination. It must also be recollected that in various ways the farmers are directly affected by the expenditure in the towns. They have relations with the business people and often have relatives engaged in the trade of a market town. Yet it cannot be denied that country tradespeople might do more to attract their customers, and especially those smaller residents to be found in the Midlands, who spend from £500 to £1000 a year, are obliged to consider economy and are sometimes alienated by want of consideration and a tendency, which has

been noted, to take as much and give as little in return as possible in the matter of prices.

It has more than once happened to me that when I have recommended a town I have been met with the observation, "Oh, but it is such an expensive place, isn't it?" In some cases, no doubt the reputation for high charges lives on after the people who made them, yet it is none the less good for trade that such an impression should be removed. Nevertheless I am quite clear that it is a duty which those owe to the country in which they hunt, and especially if they come from a distance, as far as possible to deal in the place where they find their pleasure. There must not be in this any more than in anything else a divorce between the interests of the inhabitants of a district and the hunt. I have dwelt long on this topic, because it is of great importance to the future of hunting, and also on the other side, to the prosperity of country towns. I believe too that the continuance of the well-being of country tradespeople is a matter of national importance. If they must at last inevitably be absorbed by the great stores and mighty shops, let us at least put off the evil day as long as possible, and neither as customers nor sellers hasten it by selfishness or greed.

But as these considerations affect the expenditure of hunting folk, I think it may be said that our expenses must in the nature of things be higher than they would be at our homes, or in London or Brighton. We must be prepared for this, then, for while we ask for and expect the best quality, yet we must remember that business in the country neither occupies so large a capital nor has so rapid a turnover as in London or other great cities, and that therefore slightly higher charges are admissible. On our side, we have not

to pay carriage or to cart our parcels up from the station, and the advantage of this ought not to and cannot remain without a balance to the seller. The tradesman is entitled to charge for the expenses of distribution.

Another item in our expenditure in the Midlands, which must be a large one, is the subscription to the hunt. Nor ought this to be the only subscription we pay, seeing that the charities and the amusements of the district have a claim on us which must not be put on one side. These are as much a part of the expense of hunting as our stable bills or the wages of our servants. People have no moral right to come into a neighbourhood to hunt and leave the place no better or happier for it. We ought on every ground to try to make people feel that the hunt brightens the whole life of the neighbourhood and adds to its resources for the relief of suffering and distress. It would be futile and useless to lay down rules or to estimate the sums to be so expended, but a wise and kindly liberality will be our best guide in such matters.

As to the subscription to the hunt, that is a much misunderstood duty. If in the past every one had tried to give as much, and not as little, as they decently could, we should not now have so many difficulties to contend with. But at all events things have not been as they should be in this respect, and hunt committees have been forced to fix minimum subscriptions. Elsewhere I have discussed some of the problems of hunt finance, but now I take things as they are. Thus it will be found that the subscriptions will vary a little in different centres. From Melton the Quorn asks for £40 from those who hunt regularly with them. The Cottesmore £25, and the Belvoir

a total of £25 for the season, not a great deal for the sport provided. But to this must be added another £50 for other funds connected with the hunt, of which £20 or so, distributed as a well-earned Christmas gift among the hunt servants of the different hunts, will occur to every one as in no way extravagant. A man hunting from Market Harborough would probably subscribe to but two hunts, and £100 for the season would suffice for everything. But those who have a large number of horses would be expected to give more, and should do so cheerfully. A rich man should not be taxed indeed because he is rich, but he should pay more because he has a larger share of the sport to which all contribute.

In practice, however, very few people pay much more than the minimum. The poor sportsman who drags his "pony" out of a shallow purse and goes without something in order to find it does not grudge the money, but he does feel a little aggrieved that when money is wanted no more is to be obtained from the owner of ten horses than from the master of one. If a certain sum constitutes membership of the hunt, as it does in most cases, it is difficult to enforce a larger payment, yet there is no doubt the payments in such cases are disproportionate. To this we can only respond that it is a universal law that the poor man's pleasures are more "costly" than those of the rich. "If he can't afford it, he ought not to have it," says Dives. But if Lazarus were to give up hunting, the sport would very soon come to an end. The genteel "beggar on horse-back" is the backbone of most hunts. Perhaps if we knew everything, the "pauper of the Pytchley" is not the only one of his class who has hunted in the Shires.

It is possible of course, to hunt in the Shires and pay much less than the sums I have named, for if a visitor chooses Rugby £30 will make him free of three hunts; the minimum of the Atherstone, the Warwickshire and the North Warwickshire being a modest £10; and the other subscriptions and expenses would be reduced in proportion. Another £10 might be enough to satisfy conscience, if not quite all that a liberal soul would desire to give. Thus a man who hunted with only one of these packs might expend no more than £15 for some of the best sport in England.

If we take the Midlands through we shall find that the difference in the sport depends not on fashion, not even on the country, so much as on the foxes, the hounds and the huntsman. I do not think I should be wrong in saying that the last three may be ranked in the order named, and they will all three be found as good in less as in more fashionable countries. I think experience will show that, granted that we are to hunt away from home, the additional expenses are considerably greater in the Midlands than elsewhere in one important particular, and that is the price of our horses. I should put down the additional expense in purchasing horses in a stable of six at from £500 to £750 more than would be required for that purpose in a good provincial country, but I have dealt with the all-important question of horses elsewhere. This is money out of pocket at the time, but horses well bought, well kept, and well ridden are always worth a proportion of their original cost if you desire to sell them.

If we say, then, that the additional cost of a season in the Midlands beyond our ordinary expenditure, doing things in a fairly comfortable way but without

extravagance, would amount to £1000, I do not think the estimate excessive. Some people spend a great deal more, but, on the other hand, many undoubtedly spend less. The actual expenses of hunting proper have, however, little to do with the large expenditure, though, unless for special reasons, be it always remembered, no one would pick out the Midlands for experiments in economy in sport.

To those who live in the grass countries more or less all the year hunting is not much more expensive than elsewhere. The higher rates of subscription, as we have seen, make the sport more costly in the neighbourhoods of Melton and Market Harborough, and of course the horse required is much dearer to buy. But if you live in the country, and are neither forced to buy in the autumn nor to sell in the spring, this additional cost may be reduced to a minimum. One of the results of polo is, curiously enough, to increase in a slight degree the expense of hunting. For the hunters are sold in the spring to make way for polo ponies, and the ponies go to Tattersall's in the autumn to make way for hunters. This is to buy in a rising and sell in a falling market, and is consequently expensive.

After all it is impossible to lay down rules for expenditure. So much depends on method, economy and care that very little more than the hints offered above could be of any general service. Questions about expenses must answer themselves in practice. I notice that Ladies' Papers are very fond of spending other peoples' incomes for them on paper, but I should doubt if anybody ever arranged their expenditure on any of the ingenious plans suggested. I am quite sure that in many cases if this were attempted there would be a serious deficit in the balance at the end

of the year. I am certainly not going to attempt one of these domestic budget estimates for a hunting season. If two men start in November with the same stud, the same establishment and an equal outfit, we know very well that one may easily spend many hundreds more than the other in the course of the season, and have but the same, or even a less, amount of sport to show for it.

CHAPTER XV

THE PROSPECTS OF HUNTING IN GRASS COUNTRIES

Farmers and Hunting—Masters and the Crowd—Grass Countries
—Hunting Strengthens the Farmer's Position—Its growing
Importance to him—Hunting a Sport without Vested Rights
—"Borderers" and Capping—Dangers to the Popularity of
Hunting—Wire—Poultry Funds.

HUNTING rests ultimately on the public opinion of a district in its favour. No one can deny that in the Shires this opinion is on the whole strongly in favour of hunting. So much is this the case that the disaffected are often silenced and sometimes obliged to give a reluctant consent and support to hunting. But this secret dislike to hunting, which I shall have to write of later, is not as a rule to be found among the farmers. On the whole, hunting is undoubtedly a benefit to farmers as a class. I say as a class, because I do not think that in grass countries farmers as individuals make much, if any, direct profit out of hunting. I was once trying to point out the benefits of hunting to a farmer who would not take down his wire. "I don't see where I come in," he said. "I grow no corn; I cut no hay; and you surely won't tell me that the hunt coming over my land makes much difference in the price of beasts." I endeavoured nevertheless to point out to him that this was the case; that the class of people who made up the hunt

were precisely those who created the demand for the choice beasts he fattened ; and that if they were not allowed to hunt neither Leicestershire nor England would keep them in the winter time. Then he fell back on the damage done by three or four hundred horsemen sweeping over his farm—the hoof-marks in the grass, the breaches in the fences, the gates left open, horses and cattle wandering over the fields or down the roads. But I pointed out that the grass countries had been ridden over by crowds not much less than those of to-day for at least a century, and that they were still exactly what they always were, some of the best and most profitable grazing lands in England. To which he urged that the crowds were strangers from all parts of England and from all parts of the world. The answer was that this was at least nothing new ; that the Quorn out of twenty-four masters had had but two who were local men ; out of twenty-seven masters the Pytchley had had sixteen strangers ; that most of the men whose names are bound up with the history of hunting in the Shires and made the fame of its most splendid periods were from distant counties, drawn to Melton or Leicester or Market Harborough or Grantham by the fame of the hounds, the charm of the district as a riding ground, and possibly in some degree by the social attractiveness which these gatherings of so-called strangers gave to the district.

Leicestershire and Northamptonshire feed just as fine beasts as ever, for if the grass is no better, it is certainly no worse for the hunting. In grass countries, if the damage fund is carefully and liberally administered, I think in the matter of direct profit or loss hunting leaves the farmer very much as it found him. On the other hand, this sport is the natural recreation

of the farmer, and, if he or his sons are horsemen, can be made to fit into the work of the farm without much expense. Many farmers do hunt even now in grass countries, and when better times come to the land, as come they certainly must, most of them will doubtless find their recreation as of old in the hunting field.

But there are other reasons why the farmers as a class support hunting. The farmer is by his business an observant man, though not as a rule free with his tongue, so he cannot fail to note that hunting gives to farmers a very different and much more powerful weight in the social scale than they would have without it. It is possible, though not likely, that in some countries the farmers might make a little more individually out of their farms if there was no hunting. But I think that, though for obvious reasons farmers—who as a class have the wisdom of silence—do not say much they see clearly enough how in many ways their position is strengthened socially and politically by the popularity of hunting. First of all, as long as hunting lasts the farmer has something to give which his fellow-men desire to have—the privilege of riding over his land. He has, in fact, under his absolute power and control a valuable piece of patronage. Whatever may have been the case once, we all recognise this now, and a man who offends the farmers in his neighbourhood is regarded rather as a nuisance to the hunt. Every one who is interested in the hunt is grateful for the privilege generously extended; and if we can do anything for those who grant it we are glad to be able to do it. Each man who hunts is the farmer's friend, and I think every one will agree with me that the goodwill often takes a practical form. But it is its existence which is the point. While

hunting lasts, the farmer is a man of influence out of proportion to his wealth. Without hunting he would be nobody, of less importance socially than the well-to-do tradesman, of smaller influence politically than the labourers who work in his fields. This is not the place to discuss politics, but at all events the particular class of politicians who gird at sport are not the least likely to be of the smallest use to the farmer in anything he wants. The farmers have an instinctive feeling that from his sympathy with country life a sportsman is their best representative. "I shall always vote for Mr. L—— while he rides as straight as he do," was the view of a farmer, who perhaps only dimly perceived the very real connection between the value of his vote and the existence of sport.

Hunting is more important now to the farmer even than it was thirty or forty years ago, because then the great majority of country gentlemen were resident on their estates and the farmer was naturally on friendly and neighbourly terms with them, and thus exercised his influence through them and found sympathetic counsellors and advocates in men whose interests were identical with his own. The country gentlemen rested their influence on the farmers, who in their turn could make their opinions felt through the "country party," then powerful in Parliament. But when in course of time the country gentlemen decayed in wealth and influence, the link between the farmer and the governing classes was broken, and we constantly see how Governments, Tory or Radical, feel that they can afford to neglect the wishes and interests of agricultural folk.

To a very great extent hunting, particularly in the grass countries, has been a compensation to the farmers for this loss of power. Sometimes they complain that

the people who ride over their land are strangers and not the neighbours they know. If they would only consider it, that is the very best thing possible for them. There is a continual stream of members of both Houses of Parliament, men of business, lawyers, financiers, authors, journalists, fairly well-to-do men of every class in fact, flowing into the fashionable countries. Masters of hounds, secretaries of hunts and committee men are always dinning into the ears of these visitors the fact that hunting is not a right, but a privilege for which we have to thank the farmers. Thus large classes of people, who would never have come in contact with the agricultural classes, are taught to know and to respect them. To know the English farmer is not only to respect but to like him, and thus to every part of England Leicestershire hunting fields send out a number of well-wishers and earnest advocates of the farmer's interests. In my opinion hunting is the farmer's best instrument of power, and indeed stands between him and social and political insignificance, and I think my readers will agree with me that the farmers have used their power not only kindly and well, but judiciously. They have protested, and rightly, when hunting men have shown a disposition to disregard their rights, but they have never taken any steps seriously to injure the sport. Farmers know well that if once they stopped hunting in any district, they might not find it restarted again. It must be evident too that in hunting countries farmers who oppose hunting are not popular with the classes above and below them and have not the general sympathy of their own fellows. The farmer who keeps up his wire in a hunting district is naturally not a favourite with the business people, for he drives away custom, nor with the labourers, whose sympathies

are always with a bit of spö-ort. He is regarded as a selfish person by his neighbours, because he drives the hunt on to other people's land so that they get more than their share of people riding over their grass. Then I believe that the farmers have a genuinely patriotic interest in supporting hunting. They believe that it is the training of the hunting field which helps to make our soldiers and yeomen what they are, and they feel with a just pride that England owed much in our late war as of old to a class of men—her farmers—whom of late years she has neglected and even flouted. The farmers see that the war, though not in the old way of high prices yet in a very real sense, has increased their importance to the national life, and they know that without the great national sport of hunting they could not have done what they have.

Perhaps some day, when the question of our horse supply is really seriously considered, our yeomen will be assisted by Government to keep their horses and to hunt with their country packs. This would solve the questions of half the men's training and all the difficulties of horse supply as well. I cannot imagine a more efficient troop horse than one which has had the discipline of some training in the ranks of a squadron, combined with the schooling of its intelligence in the hunting field.

But with the decreased resources of the landed classes at the present day and the increasing wealth of those who hunt, it is evident that it ought to be a point of honour with hunting people to make the expenses fall as lightly as possible on the farmer. This necessitates a very large expenditure nowadays. Nevertheless if everybody who hunted paid moderately for their sport, sufficient money could be collected

to meet all just demands. There should be a minimum subscription, which might be fixed at £10 for a man who took out one horse a day and £20 for two. There is no greater mistake than to fix a minimum which is not within the power of every man who can hunt at all to pay. For if you refuse to take less under any circumstances, people will either come out without paying, or you must be rude to them and make enemies. The remedy is the cap of £2, say some people, and this is probably true where the subscription is £10, but when that is combined with a minimum of £25 there is an obvious opening for the cry that hunting is the sport of the rich. "So it ought to be," say some people; yet I am convinced that the raising of that cry will be fatal to hunting. Those who fail to see this take short views and have never realised what hunting depends on for its existence.

It rests, as we have said, on prescription and on its own popularity. The right of hunting is not a thing that can be bought and sold. The hunt has no definite right to offer, because the thing people wish to do is to ride over another person's land. But this privilege is in no sense the property of the hunt, and can neither be given to an individual to whom the farmers objected nor taken away from one to whom they are willing to grant it. It is wise, then, to see that rules as to subscription and capping are applied impartially to those who ought to be made to pay. But they must not be considered so sacred as to admit of no exception. The people to whom they chiefly apply are those who come into the country and take houses or stables for the purpose of hunting. Such people have no particular interest or loyalty for the country side, apart from the sport it affords, and are no more to be considered "residents" than a

man who rents a house at a watering-place for the season.

In practice this class gives very little trouble. Before they come into the country they generally find out what is expected of them. Indeed they are generally anxious to be regarded as members of the hunt and willing to pay for the honour. It is true of course that such people may not always give quite as much as they ought to do, but if they did they would not perhaps be as rich as they are.

There are two classes of people who must be considered. First the "borderers," the men who have the bad luck to live near the border of one hunt and find it convenient to hunt over the limit line with a neighbouring pack once or twice a week. These men probably subscribe to the hunt of the district in which they live. But this is no reason why they should hunt for nothing with a neighbouring pack. A cap or special rate of subscription seems to apply to this class and meet their case. But a class which requires much more tact is the class of permanent residents in the district. The men who have as many hundreds to spend as the visitors have thousands, the men who have other occupations and to whom hunting is purely a delightful recreation or an unrivalled means of health or pleasure. These men, too, should give what they can. But there might be an attempt made—I am not sure that it has not been done already—to make subscriptions so heavy as practically to exclude all but the wealthy from this sport. I repeat that I have no doubt whatever, and I do not think any man who has really studied the subject carefully can doubt that such an attempt, if successful, would bring about the speedy downfall of hunting. What bad times and

wire and mange have failed to do in a score of years, selfishness and pride of purse would succeed in doing in a few months.

The privilege of hunting with a pack in a man's native or adopted country rests on precisely the same basis as hunting itself—on long custom and common consent. Who are the people whom perhaps it is sought to exclude, and who certainly are sometimes even now made to feel unwelcome? They are the smaller gentry, whom love for the land has brought back to settle in the country, and the professional men and business folk of the market towns. All these are men of local importance. They have business connections and sometimes ties of relationship with the farmers. They will as a rule be liberal according to their means, which are not large. But, whether they are generous or the reverse, they are most valuable supporters of hunting. A hunt which has these people on its side is fortunate, for there will be so many centres of influence working for it. If they were indifferent or hostile, the effect would be felt at once. The prospects of hunting are good now; never indeed were better; and I have given some reasons for thinking that the interests of the farmers are inextricably bound up with those of hunting. But the chief—I had almost written the only—danger is from within. A hunt's worst enemies are arrogance, pride of pocket, selfishness, want of imagination or of sympathy in its rules and their administration. Turn back to the history of the past and note that when a master, or secretary, or even a leading member of the hunt is unpopular how foxes decrease and wire grows in length. What can we suppose would happen if the unpopular people in a hunt were multiplied by twenty? It

is sometimes said that people want to hunt cheaply and that strangers to a country are a great evil. To the first we reply that of all the ways of supporting a hunt money is, though indispensable, the least important. A hunt does not at all rest on its wealth, or we should find that the hunts with the largest subscriptions would have the fewest difficulties in their way, whereas we know that they are not in the least exempt from wire or hostility.

The real danger to hunting arises from three causes, of which I will write frankly. First of all, there is a certain arrogance—what we used at Oxford in our possibly pedantic but not inexpressive phrase to call “hubris”—on the part of a certain class. Then there is carelessness about the duties and courtesies of hunting; there are gates left open and fences broken down. Thirdly, the cloud of second horsemen, who are a real source of irritation, and worst of all the long trail of people behind the hunt, who ride on enjoying themselves but breaking down fences and doing mischief. At this point I may say that, while we may legitimately jump at a fence and possibly smash it in so doing, it is at the present day absolutely inexcusable to dismount and deliberately break down a fence in order to make a passage through it. If fences were only injured by those who jumped them fairly, I believe that there would be far less wire than there is. The sting of a hunt, like that of a scorpion, is in its tail.

Now, I am not saying that the farmer is faultless. He has the failing of all the English middle class, “tetchiness,” and often does himself and the hunt harm by keeping up wire on account of some quite imaginary wrong that no one but himself has ever thought of. But he, like other people, feels and

resents the defect common to all English society, which has been defined as caused by "the superior manners of inferior people and the inferior manners of superior people."

But is there no hostility to hunting? I think there is some, though it is kept in check by the genuine popularity of the sport. It exists, however, and is sufficient to be a danger. There are those who conscientiously believe all sport to be morally wrong. There are a few people who dislike everything that gives pleasure to others; some who cannot see why people should like what they themselves do not care for. There are some again who really think that the passage of the hunt over their farms does more damage than can possibly be recompensed to them by anything that the hunt can do for them. There are the owners of prize-bred fowls who put down every loss to the foxes. Many of these people are mistaken, but if they do not think so and cannot be brought to see it, the danger is the same. Then there is a class of politicians who believe that English love of sport is a real hindrance to the spread of liberal opinions.

So long as public opinion and the common interest keep these in check—well. But if ever hunting people give them a really taking cry, such as that hunting is "the sport of the rich," and if the malcontents are strengthened by the resentment of those who have been driven from the hunting field when they believe, and perhaps with justice, that they have as much right as any one else and can rally to themselves the class jealousies which seethe under the surface of our rural life, it will be all over with hunting, and indeed with sport of all kind in England. I do not say that the danger is now imminent,

but it is there, and should be carefully considered by those who have the most influence, the masters, the secretaries, and the hunt committees. Nothing would be more fatal now than to take short views.

There is one point already alluded to, and that is the question of poultry funds, but as a matter of fact there can be very little wanting in that matter in the Shires, for the sums paid show that hunt secretaries and committees, in the Shires at least, have thoroughly grasped the increased value of poultry and the importance of it as a cottage industry.

On the whole there is perhaps not more opposition to hunting than there has always been, but in these days the opponents are neither so silent nor so isolated as they were, and they can and do combine to a certain extent. The remedy is in our own hands by close alliance with and support of the farmers, and even more by the thousand and one courtesies and acts of neighbourly kindness which go far to make up the charm of country life.

CHAPTER XVI

PRINCIPAL FIXTURES WITHIN TEN MILES OF THE CHIEF HUNTING CENTRES

Hacking to the Meet—Often good for the Horse—Fixtures from Melton with the Quorn, Cottesmore and Belvoir—From Market Harborough with the Cottesmore, Mr. Fernie's, Woodland Pytchley and Pytchley—From Rugby with the Pytchley, Atherstone, North Warwickshire and Warwickshire—From Leicester with Mr. Fernie's, the Atherstone and Quorn—From Oakham with the Belvoir, Quorn, Cottesmore, Mr. Fernie's, Woodland Pytchley and Fitzwilliam—From Leamington with the North Warwickshire and Warwickshire.

THE following list of the fixtures of the hunts named in this book which are within hacking distance of the principal centres should be of use to the new-comer to the neighbourhood, and may even be an occasional help to the older residents. The outside radius is ten miles as the crow flies, and while most of the fixtures given are well within this, a few will be found to be just outside. Ten or twelve miles is not too much even for one horse to be hacked on to the place of meeting; and if we have two out, the first horse might even go farther. It has been an opinion held by many men of experience that a hunter is all the better for a steady trot of anything under a dozen miles before hunting; most people find the ride to covert delightful, and though, as time goes on, we should not be sorry to drive home again,

yet I think many men would acknowledge that they would be very sorry to give up the morning ride, and that they go all the better and are on better terms with their horse after it. The fixtures named may sometimes be altered, but the neighbourhood drawn on any particular day will remain the same and the distances consequently do not vary much. The list may help any one who is doubtful as to where he shall cast his winter lot in comparing the different advantages of the various centres.

MELTON

QUORN—

Widmerpool
Upper Broughton
Ab Kettleby
Grimston
Willoughby
Wymeswold
Prestwold
Sixhills
Thrussington
Rearsby
Ratcliffe-on-Wreake
Kirby Gate
Great Dalby
Twyford
Lowesby
Billesdon
Ashby Folville
Gaddesby Hall
Baggrave
Hungarton
Quenby
Keyham
Scraftoft
Brooksby
Queniborough

QUORN (*continued*)—

Syston
Barkby
Beeby
Barsby

COTTESMORE—

Stapleford
Wymondham
Market Overton
Cottesmore
Ashwell
Burley
Oakham
Brooke
Whissendine
Braunston
Coles Lodge
Launde
Loddington Hall
Tilton Wood
Owston
Knossington
Cold Overton
Somerby
Pickwell

MELTON (*continued*)COTTESMORE (*continued*)—

Leesthorpe
Wylds Lodge

BELVOIR—

Langar
Plungar
Belvoir
Three Queens
Buckminster

BELVOIR (*continued*)—

Harby
Hose
Piper Hole
Goadby
Croxtan Park
Waltham
Stonesby
Holwell Mouth

MARKET HARBOROUGH

COTTESMORE—

Tilton
Loddington
Belton
Wardley Wood

Mr. FERNIE'S. The whole of
the country except—

Thurnby
Countesthorpe
Blaby Wharf

WOODLAND PYTCHLEY—

Dingley
Ashley
Wilbarston
Rockingham
Corby
Giddington
Boughton
Weekley
Rushton
Dob Hall
Pipwell

PYTCHLEY—

Loddington
Cransley
Faxton
Scaldwell
Lampport
Maidwell
Foxhall
Harrington
Kelmarsh
Arthingworth
Great Oxendon
Clipston
Haselbeech
Cottesbrooke
Guilsborough
Thornby
Cold Ashby
Naseby
Winwick
Stanford
Hempholw
Welford
South Kilworth
North Kilworth

RUGBY

PYTCHLEY—

Lutterworth
 North Kilworth
 South Kilworth
 Welford
 Cold Ashby
 Winwick
 West Haddon
 Long Buckby
 Watford
 Norton
 Daventry
 Welton
 Braunston
 Ashby St. Ledgers
 Crick
 Yelvertoft
 Lilbourne
 Cattthorpe
 Swinford
 Stanford Park

ATHERSTONE—

Bitteswell
 Ullesthorp
 Smockington
 Shilton Station
 Binley
 Combe

ATHERSTONE (*continued*)—

Brinklow
 Newbold Revel
 Newnham Paddox
 Brownsover
 Coton House

NORTH WARWICKSHIRE—

Clifton
 Hillmorton
 Dunchurch
 Bilton Hall
 Frankton
 Offchurch
 Weston
 Cubbington
 Stoneleigh
 Baginton

NORTH WARWICKSHIRE—

Bubbenhall
 Stretton
 Wolston

WARWICKSHIRE—

Ufton Wood
 Lower Shuckburgh
 Long Itchington
 Birdingbury

LEICESTER

Mr. FERNIE'S—

Thurnby
 Houghton
 Billesdon
 Rolleston
 Tur Langton
 Kibworth

Mr. FERNIE'S (*continued*)—

Saddington
 Mowsley
 Bruntingthorpe
 Shearsby
 Arnesby
 Kilby

LEICESTER (*continued*)Mr. FERNIE'S (*continued*)—

Countesthorp
Wistow
Oadby
Stretton
Great Glen
Burton Overy
Norton
Ilston

ATHERSTONE—

Stapleton
Kerkly
Peckleton
Newbold Verdun
Ratly Burrows

QUORN—

Blaby Station
Kirkby Muxloe
Markfield
Copt Oak Wood
Five Dale Trees
Nanpantan

QUORN (*continued*)—

Beaumanoir
Quorn
Woodhouse Eaves
Swithland
Rothley House
Old John Bradgate Park
Anstey
Ratcliffe on Wreake
Rearsby
Syston
Queniborough
Brooksby
Barkby
Gaddesby
Ashby Folville
Twyford
Loseby
Quenby
Scraptoft
Keyham
Hungarton
Baggrave
Beeby

OAKHAM

Commands the whole of the Cottesmore country within a ten mile radius, also all Mr. Fernie's Saturday and a part of his Friday country.

THE BELVOIR—

Buckminster
Stonesby
Waltham

THE QUORN—

Quenby
The Coplow (just over
the limit)

THE QUORN (*continued*)—

Hungarton
Baggrave
Ashby Folville
Gaddesby Hall
Great Dalby
Kirby Gate
Twyford
Lowesby

OAKHAM

THE COTTESMORE—

The Bull Witham
 Holywell
 Tickencote
 Empingham
 Witchley Warren
 North Luffenham
 Morcott
 Uppingham
 Hambleton
 Burley
 Exton
 Normanton
 Langham
 Ashwell
 Market Overton
 Stapleford
 Whissendine
 Wylds Lodge
 Leesthorpe
 Pickwell
 Somerby
 Knossington
 Owston Wood
 Braunston
 Brooke
 Launde Abbey
 Coles Lodge
 Whadborough
 Tilton Wood
 Loddington Hall
 Belton
 Ridlington
 Wardley Wood
 Preston
 Stoke End
 Beamont Chase

QUORN—

Kirby Gate
 Great Dalby
 Twyford
 Lowesby
 Quenby
 Baggrave
 Ashby Folville
 Hungerton
 Billesdon Coplow

BELVOIR—

Melton Mowbray
 Waltham
 Stonesby
 Buckminster

Mr. FERNIE'S Thursday—

Billesden Village
 Rolleston
 Goadby
 Keythorpe Hall
 Skeffington
 Hallaton

Friday or Saturday—

Allextan
 Horninghold
 Stockerston
 Blaston
 Horninghold

WOODLAND PYTCHLEY AND

FITZWILLIAM—

Laxton Hall

LEAMINGTON

NORTH WARWICKSHIRE. Practically the whole country except a few meets on the Birmingham (Saturday) and Worcestershire side

WARWICKSHIRE—

Birdingbury
Long Itchington
Ufton Wood
Shuckburgh is a little beyond the ten mile radius, but easily reached
Ladbroke
Fenny Compton
Burton Dassett
Kineton
Ettington

WARWICKSHIRE (*continued*)—

Goldicote
Stratford-on-Avon
Smithfield
Burford
Hampton Lucy
Charlecote
Wellesbourne
Compton Verney
Walton Hall
Chadshunt
Gaydon
Light Thorne
Newbold Pacey
Itchington Holt
Tachbrook
Harbury

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